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Constructing Afro-Cuban Womanhood: Race, Gender, and Citizenship in Republican-Era Cuba, 1902-1958

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Constructing Afro-Cuban Womanhood: Race, Gender, and Citizenship in Republican-Era Cuba, 1902-1958

by

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Dedication

To my parents, James and Kathleen, and my sister Tamerit.

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As I reflect on the process of writing this dissertation, I am reminded of the African proverb: It takes a village to raise a child. I believe that the same can be said for bringing a dissertation to fruition, and I am deeply appreciative of each individual who has offered me guidance, support, and encouragement.

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Constructing Afro-Cuban Womanhood: Race, Gender, and Citizenship in Republican-Era Cuba, 1902-1958

Takkara Keosha Brunson, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

Supervisor: Frank Guridy

This dissertation explores continuities and transformations in the construction of Afro-Cuban womanhood in Cuba between 1902 and 1958. A dynamic and evolving process, the construction of Afro-Cuban womanhood encompassed the formal and informal practices that multiple individuals—from lawmakers and professionals to intellectuals and activists to workers and their families—established and challenged through public debates and personal interactions in order to negotiate evolving systems of power. The dissertation argues that Afro-Cuban women were integral to the formation of a modern Cuban identity. Studies of pre-revolutionary Cuba dichotomize race and gender in their analyses of citizenship and national identity formation. As such, they devote insufficient attention to the role of Afro-Cuban women in engendering social transformations. The dissertation's chapters—on patriarchal discourses of racial progress, photographic representations, *la mujer negra* (the black woman), and feminist, communist, and labor movements—probe how patriarchy and assumptions of black racial inferiority simultaneously informed discourses of citizenship within a society that sought to project itself as a white masculine nation. Additionally, the dissertation examines how Afro-Cuban women's writings and social activism shaped legal reforms, perceptions of *cubanidad* (Cuban identity), and Afro-Cuban community formation. The study utilizes a

variety of sources: organizational records, letters from women to politicians, photographic representations, periodicals, literature, and labor and education statistics. Engaging the fields of Latin American history, African diaspora studies, gender studies, and visual culture studies, the dissertation maintains that an intersectional analysis of race, gender, and nation is integral to developing a nuanced understanding of the pre-revolutionary era.

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INTRODUCTION

Constructing Afro-Cuban Womanhood: Race, Gender, and Citizenship during the Republican Era, 1902–1958

The period following the establishment of the Republican Era was one of hesitant anticipation for most Cubans. During the Wars for Independence (1868–1898), insurgent leaders began to articulate a patriarchal rhetoric of racial equality in an effort to mobilize a range of social groups—men and women, whites and individuals of African descent, elites and the laboring poor—in the fight against Spanish colonialism. Because many of these groups participated in the political sphere in ways in which they had not done during the colonial period, they manifested desires for the attendant rights of citizenship, such as political representation and full suffrage. The ratification of the 1901 Constitution and the creation of the Platt Amendment that gave the U.S. government the right to intervene in national affairs, however, made the futures of Cubans particularly uncertain. Between 1902 and 1958—an era of intense disputes over racial equality, family law, women's suffrage, labor reform, the legacy of colonialism, and national sovereignty—ideas of who merited citizenship rights were constantly evolving, and members of the varying social classes often disagreed on the terms of legal reform and social belonging. As the direction of the nation became a central topic of discussion, racial and gender equality dominated social and political debates.

Notions of a democratic Cuban nation entailed a range of inclusive and ever-shifting perspectives, which allowed women, Afro-Cubans, and workers to propose a number of definitions of citizenship and strategies for social mobility. While some Cubans envisioned a nation that included patriarchal definitions of citizenship that

afforded political rights to all men, regardless of race, others questioned the ability of Afro-Cubans to contribute to national progress due to their assumed inferiority (which elite and aspiring-class Cubans of color actively challenged). Other Cubans debated the right of women to participate in the legal system, own property, divorce their husbands, and vote in elections; and still others debated the role of the Church, the oligarchic elite, and the U.S. government in maintaining political and economic power that carried over from the nineteenth century. While visions of the future varied, Cubans maintained one common viewpoint: They needed to create a modern society distinct from the colonial system. In other words, as incredibly distinct as the ideologies might be, each and every method for improvement, including racial and gendered, was centered on the universal goal of ensuring Cuba's prosperity.

Ideas about Cuban citizenship were also rooted in material concerns, such as living conditions and labor opportunities, and both Afro-Cubans and women (including Afro-Cuban women) concerned about their stake in the nation's progress fought for their rights. While both groups sought political representation and access to education and employment, the reasons they demanded legal and social reforms were varied and complex. For Cubans of color, racial inequality was the primary concern. Despite their role in the independence movement and contributions to society, Cubans of color lived in a post-emancipation society where many former slaves remained in poor living conditions and were marginalized by the government, and those who aspired towards social mobility within the military or public employment often confronted racial discrimination. In many cases, Afro-Cubans' attempts to challenge racism were

countered by whites who labeled racially motivated protests as racist and an effort to undermine national solidarity. Yet, as historians have demonstrated, nationalist discourses did enable Cubans of color a certain amount of leverage in the nation's political system, and indeed, a small elite class became propertied, established themselves as professionals, and even held elected offices.

Women, on the other hand, were marginalized within patriarchal visions of the nation that asserted a woman's role as a patriot-mother without granting her legal rights. Because elite politicians and intellectuals promoted male leadership within the public sphere and home life, understandings of womanhood stemmed from colonial gender conventions, which limited women's contributions to the domestic realm. Moreover, under Spanish colonial law, fathers and husbands served as the legal guardians of their wives and children, and a woman's sexual purity determined the honor of her family. During the early twentieth century, lawmakers sought to distinguish Cuban democracy from the colonial system in order to create a new modern society. Family law soon became a topic of debate, centered on the issues of property, marriage, and divorce. These issues promoted Cuban feminists to insert themselves into the male-dominated body politic as active citizens. For example, the passage of the divorce law in 1918 shifted gender relations by granting women new legal powers as individuals able to act on their own behalf. Such reforms initiated a transformation in gender conventions that would fundamentally alter the terms of citizenship and encourage debate throughout the period.

As much as the established scholarship examines these social movements and the development of racial and gender ideologies, it tends to focus on Afro-Cuban male leaders and white feminists in a way that can obscure the complexity of Cuban nation formation. By directing a narrative of national identity and state formation on Afro-Cuban women, who were marginalized within movements for racial and gender reform during the Republican Era (1902-1958), this dissertation views a Cuba that consisted of women of color activists, intellectuals, workers, and wives. Afro-Cuban women were at the center of contestations over citizenship and social belonging as both symbols of racial progress for Cubans of color and agents of identity formation and political development. In the process, they complicated many Cubans' attempts to construct a white elite patriarchal vision of the nation. By analyzing the activist and intellectual activities of Cuban women of color, as well as the ideas that resulted from such activities, I argue that Afro-Cuban women played a crucial role in the development of a modern Cuban identity.

The central objectives of this dissertation are to contribute to the development of studies that examine class, race, gender, and nation as intersecting identity markers, and to document the role of Afro-Cuban women in crafting a modern nation. I seek to understand how Afro-Cuban women gave meaning to categories such as "womanhood" and "manhood," "whiteness" and "blackness," "working class," "nation," and "citizen" as ongoing ideological processes.[1] This story, therefore, considers the multiple dimensions—cultural, political, and intellectual—through which citizenship is

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[1] Gale Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917 (*Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995): 11. Also see Martin Summers' *Manliness and Its Discontents*.

constituted. More than a recovery of the lives often marginalized historically and within the historiography, I hope to link what historian Thomas Holt would consider the "everydayness" of Afro-Cuban women's experiences to the "larger historical chain of events, structures, and transformations" entrenched in Cuba's history of racial oppression, patriarchy, and class struggle.[2]

In order to examine the history of Afro-Cuban women, I seek to demonstrate that Cuban nation formation must be studied through an analysis of both race and gender. I draw from studies that underscore the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality in order to incorporate historically marginalized actors into the history of national identity and state formation. For example, black feminist theorists argue that multiple identity markers—race, gender, class, and sexuality, among others—simultaneously shape identity formation and state relations of power. Assumptions of racial difference are defined in relation to gender norms and the language of sexuality; and gender and sexuality are intrinsic to racial and class distinctions.[3] Thus, the social position of Afro-Cuban women must be understood not only through an analysis of racial dynamics within Cuba, but also their gender, class, age, and religious affiliations. Moreover, as numerous identity markers vary even within a single social group (women, elites, or whites, for example), an intersectional analysis acknowledges that multiple experiences exist, as well

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2 Thomas C. Holt. "Markings: Race, Race-Making, and the Writing of History." *American Historical Review 100,* no. 1 (Feb., 1995): 7.

3 See, for example, Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd Edition (New York: Routledge Press, 2000); Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race." *Signs* 17 (Winter 1992): 251–274; Hazel Carbey, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000).

as conceptions of that group (such as womanhood). Therefore, the study considers the construction of Afro-Cuban womanhood in its multiple forms.

As this dissertation demonstrates, Afro-Cuban women were caught between racial and gender ideologies in unique ways that differed from those of their Afro-Cuban male and white female counterparts. Confronting both racial and gender discrimination, they maintained a distinct social experience that was further complicated by class status. A small group of elite Afro-Cuban women came from educated families whose fathers were intellectuals, politicians, doctors, and professionals. Many of these elite women were themselves lawyers, doctors, and teachers. Other women who form the basis of this study were members of the aspiring class, or individuals who actively aspired for upward mobility but had not yet attained the financial stability equal to their elite and white middle-class counterparts. These aspiring-class women worked as domestics, tobacco workers, seamstresses, and textile workers. The documents that reveal the life events and perspectives of these women highlight a range of positions regarding community and nation building. As prevalent as racial equality was to nationalist rhetoric between 1902 and 1958, and as much as nationalism incorporated patriarchal perspectives that divided men and women, Afro-Cuban women's considerations of the nation lie somewhere in between the two: Confronted by both racial discrimination and patriarchy, Cuban women of color engaged both Afro-Cuban and feminist discourses of citizenship, as well as evolving discussions regarding workers' rights and national sovereignty. They also implored leaders of these social movements to address the concerns specific to laboring

Afro-Cuban women. In the process, they articulated a distinct political perspective that examined national development from the standpoint of black and mulatto women.

Afro-Cuban women's involvement in Cuban nation formation lay in their ability to navigate the shifting terrain of racial, gender, and class politics. Women such as Ana Hidalgo Vidal, Inocencia Silveira, and María Sánchez who wrote for Afro-Cuban publications presented themselves as moral leaders committed to the betterment of the community of color. Other women affiliated with Afro-Cuban societies became active in the feminist movement, asserting a woman's right to education during the early decades of the republic and later demanding full access to the political sphere. Finally, women such as Esperanza Sánchez and Consuelo Silveira became high-ranking leaders within the communist movement, maintaining their connection to Afro-Cuban societies as they presided over women's labor unions. Understanding this dynamic highlights not only a unique aspect of Afro-Cuban women's activism, but also gives us a better understanding of the connection between social movements in the field of Cuban political history in general. Afro-Cuban women also highlighted their unique experiences as citizens who suffered a "triple discrimination" defined by their race, gender, and class status. In turn, they played a crucial role in highlighting the multiple dimensions of nation formation, including the failures of democracy.

Historiographical Contributions

This dissertation intervenes in the current body of literature on Cuban nation formation by building on the existing scholarship and including it in a dialogue on race and gender

in Cuba and Latin America. This project has three goals. It seeks to bridge the gap between scholarship on race and gender within Cubanist historiography. Building on earlier studies of slavery and emancipation in Cuba, recent studies focusing on race in the republic examine how the tensions between the national rhetoric of racelessness (that Cuba existed as a society without racial distinctions) and the persistence of racial discrimination affected Afro-Cuban agency. Such works center on Afro-Cuban involvement in the movement for independence, their subsequent expectations for political inclusion and social equality, and the shifting perceptions of race among whites and Cubans of color before and following the racial massacre of 1912.[4] These analyses shed light on the nuanced conceptions of race during the period, and they examine the manifestations of racial understandings on sociopolitical and material realities in local and transnational spaces, in addition to the interaction of legal, scientific, and political discourses in defining race and social policies.[5] The studies of historians Alejandro de la Fuente and Frank Guridy in particular identify decency and respectability as a theme within Afro-Cuban political and cultural discourses, including elite men's efforts to

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4 Tomás Fernandez Robaina, *El negro en Cuba, 1902–1958: apuntes para la historia de la lucha contra la disriminacion racial* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1990); Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Empire* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1898–1912 (*Durham: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), and Karen Y. Morrison, "Civilization and Citizenship through the Eyes of Afro-Cuban Intellectuals during the First Constitutional Era, 1902–1940," *Cuban Studies* 30 (1999): 83; Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba*)Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

5 Frank Guridy, "Racial Knowledge in Cuba: The Production of a Social Fact, 1912-1944" (Ph.D. diss, University of Michigan, 2002); Alejandra Bronfman, *Measures of Equality: Social Science, Citizenship, and Race in Cuba, 1902-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Guridy, *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). Additionally, see Lisa Brock and Digna Castañeda Fuertes, Eds, *Between Race and Empire: African Americans and Cubans before the Cuban Revolution* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).

maintain a patriarchal social structure in which women's sexual activities were closely monitored and policed. Because both scholars highlight gender dynamics within the Afro-Cuban community and reference the rise of several black female leaders within the communist movement, they are prominently featured in this work.

The dissertation also contributes to the literature—such as the works of historians Lynn Stoner and Julio César González-Páges and historical anthropologist Verena Stolcke—that examines gender and Cuban women's activism during the Republican Era. Stoner's landmark study of the twentieth-century Cuban women's movement demonstrates that feminists utilized patriarchal gender norms to assert their political rights as caretakers and moral guardians of their families and the nation. However, Stoner focuses primarily on the contributions of white middle-class and elite feminists, and she considers the intersection of race, gender, and citizenship only in relation to the creation of the 1940 constitution.[6] González-Páges expands Stoner's analysis of the women's movement by examining the suffragist movement as a campaign that overlapped the feminist movement but also served as a distinct movement. Subsequent studies further González-Páges's examination, which highlights the heterogeneity of the women's movement, by recovering regional histories, as well as women's experiences within various political stages of Cuban history, including biographical accounts.[7] Finally, recent dissertations published within U.S. institutions build upon historical anthropologist

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6 K. Lynn Stoner, *From the House to the Streets: The Cuban Women's Movement for Legal Reform, 1898–1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

7 Julio Cesar González Pagés, *En busca de un espacio: historia de mujeres en Cuba* (La Habana: Ediciones de Ciencias Sociales, 2003); Esperanza Méndez Oliva, La estirpe de Mariana en Las Villas (Santa Clara, Cuba: Editorial Capiro, 2006); Esperanza Méndez Oliva and Santiago Alemán Santana, Villareñas camino a la emancipación (Havana: Editora Política, 2008).

Stolcke's analysis of race and patriarchy during the nineteenth century by providing nuanced analyses of sexual norms during the colonial era or explaining how conceptions of honor changed during the Republican Era. Other dissertations have focused on how gendered anxieties emerged during this time and facilitated political transformations and the role of women and gender in defining Cuban modernity.[8]

The established scholarship on race and gender in Cuba presents new insights into Afro-Cuban women's experiences within labor, social relations, and political culture. However, with the exception of the published testimony of María de los Reyes Castillo Bueno in *Reyita*, full-length analyses of women of color focus primarily on the colonial era.[9] My study expands these historiographical perspectives by examining the republican period. Moreover, the dissertation examines the role of black women across Afro-Cuban, feminist, and communist movements. It demonstrates that Afro-Cuban men and white feminists often pursued social mobility and legal rights at the expense of women of color and the laboring poor. Indeed, male Afro-Cuban leaders often articulated understandings of manhood that required the submission of women of color as virtuous mothers and caretakers. Elite and aspiring-class men of color excluded the laboring poor from their organizations, and they asserted that the poor were immoral and in need of reform.

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[8] Verena Stolcke, *Marriage, Class and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba: A Study of Racial Attitudes and Sexual Values in a Slave Society* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1974); Tiffany A. Thomas-Woodard, "Desiring Nation: Prostitution, Citizenship, and Modernity in Cuba, 1840-1920" (Ph.D. diss., University of New Mexico, 2007); Enid Lynette Logan, "Holy Sacraments and Illicit Encounters: Marriage, Race, Religion, and the Transformation of Status Hierarchies in Cuba, 1899-1940 (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2005); Sarah L. Franklin, "Suitable to Her Sex: Race, Slavery and Patriarchy in Nineteenth-Century Colonial Cuba (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 2006); Sarah R. Arvey, "'Labyrinths of Love': Sexual Propriety, Family, and Social Reform in the Second Cuban Republic, 1933-1958 (Ph.D. diss, University of Michigan, 2007).

[9] Maria de los Reyes Castillo Bueno, Reyita: The Life of a Black Cuban Woman in the Twentieth Century (London: Latin American Bureau, 2000).

During the early decades of the twentieth century, white feminists excluded Afro-Cuban women from their organizations. They appointed themselves the main authorities regarding issues that affected women and children of all races. This study demonstrates that Afro-Cuban women confronted racial, gender, and class oppression as they pursued mobility and citizenship rights. They formed coalitions with a range of political groups, but also asserted a distinct perspective that highlighted the ways in which race, gender, and class simultaneously perpetuated black women's marginalization. By taking these factors into account, this project raises new questions regarding how we conceptualize Afro-Cuban community formation and popular movements, as well as racialized and gendered understandings of citizenship and national identity.

The dissertation contributes to the historiography of women and gender in Latin America. Much of the established work has focused on the family as a political and economic institution; the intersection of gender and political culture during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century; and the negotiation of power among elites and the popular classes, women and men, and whites, African descendants, and indigenous populations.[10] Several studies, such as those of Sandra Lauderdale Graham, Eileen Findlay, Lara Putnam, Sueann Caulfield, and Gladys M. Jiménez-Muñoz demonstrate the heterogeneity of women's experiences—including those of indigenous women and women of African descent—by employing an intersectional analysis of race and gender.

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[10] Donna Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991; Heidi Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict: The Politics of Gender, Sexuality, and Labor in the Chilean Agrarian Reform, 1950–1973*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002. Also see, Suanne Caulfield, "The History of Gender in the Historiography of Latin America." *Hispanic American Historical Review* 81 (2001): 449–490.

Importantly, these studies illustrate that scholars cannot fully understand gendered identities without identifying how race produces multiple notions of womanhood within the public sphere.[11] My study expands these historiographical perspectives by focusing on the activism and intellectual work of women of African descent. It emphasizes that race and class distinctions created multiple gender formations. Indeed, racial stereotypes and social discrimination produced different understandings of womanhood among white and Afro-Cuban women. For example, women of color frequently found themselves fighting for resources already afforded to elite and middle-class white women, including access to jobs and educational institutions. Representations of black and mulatto women's hypersexuality within popular culture placed women of color outside the boundaries of respectable womanhood. As a result, Afro-Cuban were concerned with economic stability and defending their femininity in addition to obtaining political equality.

Finally, this dissertation engages African-American historiography to further consider the nuances of community formation in relation to gender, sexuality, and class, as well as women's political activism. The studies of scholars such as Evelyn

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[11] Sandra Lauderdale Graham. *House and Street: The Domestic World of Servants and Masters in Nineteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992); S. K. Besse, *Restructuring Patriarchy: the Modernization of Gender Inequality in Brazil, 1914–1940*. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1996; S. Caufield, *In Defense of Honor: Sexual Morality, Modernity, and Nation in Early-Twentieth Century Brazil*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2000; Eileen Findlay, *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870–1920*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999; Lara Putnam. *The Company They Kept: Migrants and the Politics of Gender in Caribbean Costa Rica, 1870–1915*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2002; Briggs, Laura. Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. Gladys M. Jiménez-Muñoz, "Carmen Maria Colon Pellot: On 'Womanhood' and 'Race' in Puerto Rico during the Interwar Period," *The New Centennial Review* 3 (2003): 71–91.

Higginbotham, Kevin Gaines, Glenda Gilmore, Michele Mitchell, Victoria Wolcott, and Martin Summers reveal the ways in which understandings of gender and sexuality informed racial politics among African Americans following emancipation and generated gendered of discourses racial uplift.[12] Such examinations demonstrate that the intersection of multiple identity markers with race—such as class, gender, skin color, and geographical location—produced multiple experiences within black communities. Thus, these scholars bring attention to the fact that the experiences of African Americans differed for men and women and urban and rural residents, as well as the elite, middle or aspiring classes, and the laboring poor. In addition, the field of African-American women's history provides important theoretical frameworks for analyzing Afro-Cuban women's activism both with the community of color and national public sphere. Gilmore's examination of black women's political organizing in North Carolina and Patricia Schetcher's book on Ida B. Wells illustrate that African-American women pursued equality through cross-racial political organizing within women's and progressive organizations. These investigations provide important models for conceptualizing Afro-Cuban womanhood and community formation among Cubans of color, as well as Afro-Cuban women's activist and intellectual activities.[13] My work

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[12] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race." *Signs* 17 (Winter 1992): 251–274; Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in "North Carolina, 1896–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1996); Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: The Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Martin Summers, Manliness and Its Discontents; Victoria W. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

[13] Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*; Patricia A. Schechter, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform,*

contributes to this literature by examining the experiences of women of African descent within a Cuban context. It shows that patriarchal gender norms and the rhetoric of racelessness created a political culture in which Afro-Cuban women organized primarily within male-led associations during the early years of the republic. Only by the late 1920s did they begin to articulate a distinct black female identity or establish the first known club for women of color, the Asociación Cultural Femenina (Women's Cultural Association). As such, this study provides a comparative model for examining women's activism and intellectual traditions within the African diaspora.

Mapping the Dissertation

This dissertation employs a methodology that historian Michele Mitchell terms "a social history of thought."[14] I utilize this approach to consider the ways in which Afro-Cuban women theorized their identities and Cuban nation formation in relation to evolving gender and racial understandings. The project draws upon multiple ideologies and agents to consider the development of political and cultural discourses within their historical contexts. Moreover, it contemplates the ways that social norms, understandings of national belonging, and agendas for national progress helped define Afro-Cuban women's agency. This approach allows for the incorporation of multiple source types, ranging from newspaper and magazine articles to photographs and social announcements, and from speeches and letters to interviews and published testimonies. I treat each

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1880–1930 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). See also Sandra Gunning, Tera W. Hunter, and Michele Mitchell, Eds., *Dialogues of Dispersal: Gender, Sexuality, and African Diasporas* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

[14] Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation*.

document as a reflection of the evolving social ideas regarding racial understandings, womanhood and manhood, progress and modern society, and citizen and non-citizen.

In employing a social history of thought, the dissertation examines visual representations in addition to written sources. It considers the role of photographic images and advertisements in constituting and contesting political and cultural discourses. Written primary sources infrequently address the work and experiences of Afro-Cuban women directly. Visual representations help to fill this gap: They provide a glimpse of how Afro-Cuban women sought to project themselves within the community of color and national public sphere. For example, as Chapter 3 demonstrates, elite Afro-Cubans editors published photographic portraits of accomplished women in their newspapers and magazines to help project alternative representations of manhood and womanhood in order to present the Afro-Cuban community as a "respectable" society. These visual depictions reveal both the aspirations and accomplishments of Afro-Cuban women committed to racial progress.

This study is organized both chronologically and thematically to examine how nation formation and Afro-Cuban womanhood evolved during three periods: Afro-Cuban claims for citizenship during the early years of the republic; the transformation of the feminist movement during the 1930s; and finally, popular protests initiated by the 1940 Constitution. The dissertation begins with an overview of how gender informed Afro-Cuban community formation during the early decades of the twentieth century. Chapter 1, "Patriarchy and Racial Progress During the Early Republic," outlines the social, political, and cultural challenges that Afro-Cubans confronted. The establishment of the

republic in 1902 marked a critical break from Spanish colonial traditions. In order to create a modern democratic society, Cubans sought to determine and monitor the "progress" of the nation. Yet, white elite definitions of progress undermined Afro-Cuban citizenship by projecting them as immoral and culturally and intellectually backwards. Afro-Cuban association members responded to these stereotypical and discriminatory claims by articulating patriarchal discourses of racial progress, which emphasized cultural and intellectual self-improvement. In doing so, elite and aspiring-class Afro-Cubans sought to distinguish themselves from the uneducated and sexually "immoral" laboring poor both in rhetoric and in practice. Chapter 1 demonstrates that Afro-Cuban society members established—and enforced—boundaries of inclusion and exclusion along class, gender, and color lines within their organizations, as well as their social events and published discussions of sexual morality. Relying heavily on the print culture of Afro-Cuban associations, organizational records, and published testimonies, I analyze how elite and aspiring-class Afro-Cuban male leaders promoted their interests, and attempted to regulate the behaviors of women and the laboring poor, in order to buttress their citizenship claims.

The first two decades of the republic also witnessed the development of new gender roles, which Afro-Cuban women evaluated as they articulated patriarchal discourses of racial progress. Chapter 2, "Exemplary Women: Afro-Cuban Women's Articulation of Racial Progress," analyzes their published writings and the letters they wrote to Afro-Cuban leader Juan Gualberto Gómez. Numerous black and mulatto women published articles, poetry, and short stories that sought to contribute to uplifting the

community of color, and this chapter situates their writings in dialogue with patriarchal discourses of racial progress to compel a reconsideration of women's roles in Afro-Cuban community formation. I contend in this chapter that Afro-Cuban women utilized literary venues to pursue both individual and collective advancement, even while articulating patriarchal discourses of racial progress. Moreover, I emphasize that each woman employed differing strategies based on her political affiliations and objectives. For instance, women affiliated with the Afro-Cuban political party, the Partido Independiente de Color (Independent Colored Party), venerated the group's male leadership in their articles and letters published in the organization's newspaper *Previsión*. Conversely, women writing for the elite Afro-Cuban magazine *Minerva: Revista Universal Ilustrada* (*Minerva: Universal Illustrated Magazine*) employed much of the rhetoric of their male counterparts. However, due to transforming social dynamics brought about by family reform laws, many elite Afro-Cuban women became critical of traditional gender roles that placed them within the home, and they began asserting their right to an education to ensure their own intellectual development and independence. This chapter also contributes to the history of Cuban feminism by demonstrating that Afro-Cuban women identified as feminists as late as 1910, eight years before the publication of the first known feminist magazine *Aspiraciones*. Finally, the chapters shows that elite and aspiring-class women tapped into political networks and advocated for themselves, their families, and "the race" to receive pensions, gain access to employment and educational opportunities, and garner support in challenging racial discrimination. This chapter concludes that these women were not interested in ending patriarchy per se, but rather

invoking their rights and patriotic duties as mothers and wives to create a new political identity.

Chapter 3, "Visualizing Progress: Afro-Cuban Womanhood, Sexual Politics, and Photography," studies gender and Afro-Cuban womanhood during the early republic through an examination of Afro-Cuban photographic portraiture. Technological innovations of the period made the medium more accessible, and the mass-production and circulation of consumer goods—including magazines and newspapers—created new opportunities for blacks and mulattoes to fashion images of blackness and womanhood. Afro-Cuban editors often featured photographs of females (occasionally men and children) on magazine and newspaper covers, within social pages, and occasionally in books and mainstream periodicals. This chapter demonstrates that visual documents were just as important as written texts for pursuing racial advancement and affirming black and mulatto women's respectability. Indeed, elite Cubans of color employed photography to exemplify their material, intellectual, and cultural accomplishments. As such, I argue that they created an alternative narrative of Afro-Cuban womanhood that challenged stereotypical representations of blacks and mulattos as hypersexual, immoral, and culturally backwards.

The 1920s and 1930s marked a significant shift in Afro-Cuban women's involvement in social movements. Chapter 4, "*La Mujer Negra* (the Black Woman): The Transformation of Afro-Cuban Women's Political and Social Thought during the 1930s," begins by chronicling how the rise of a popular movement led to the democratization of Cuban politics. The mid 1920s and the 1930s marked a crucial period within Cuban

history: the rise of feminism and communism empowered women and the laboring poor and challenged state leaders and white elites to redefine citizenship and worker's rights on behalf of the popular classes. Writers and artists challenged dominant representations of blackness by integrating Afro-Cuban cultural forms into national literature, music, and dance. Journalists such as Gustavo Urrutia provided a public venue for articulating a modern black identity through his weekly column "Ideales de una raza" ("Ideals of a Race"). Chapter 4 contextualizes a series of discussions regarding *la mujer negra* (the black woman) that arose during movements for legal reform beginning with the 1925 presidency of Gerardo Machado until the 1939 National Women's Congress. It demonstrates that the public acknowledgement of black women's oppression by multiple political groups engendered their entry into social movements beyond the community of color. It also contends that Afro-Cubans utilized the concept of the black female experience to move beyond the established discourses of respectability and protest the material inequalities that maintained black women's marginalization.

Finally, Chapter 5, "Enacting Citizenship: Afro-Cuban Womanhood in a New Constitutional Era," addresses, in many ways, the culmination of the various political activities black and mulatto women were involved in during the 1920s and 1930s. Having joined feminist and communist organizations, elite and aspiring-class Afro-Cuban women became prominent leaders during the 1940s. For example, feminist and communist activist Esperanza Sánchez Mastrapa attended the 1940 Constitutional Assembly as a representative of the Oriente Province. She advocated for the legal protection of workers, as well as the full citizenship rights of blacks and women. Sánchez helped to create the

1940 Constitution, which declared all Cubans to be "equal before the law," and deemed "illegal and punishable any discrimination on grounds of sex, race, color or class and any other offense to human dignity."[15] This groundbreaking document created an unprecedented legal foundation for addressing inequality: Cubans of color, communists, and labor unions could invoke their civil rights to pressure the government for work and social welfare reform and protection against social discrimination. Chapter 5 illustrates that, following the passage of the Constitution, Afro-Cuban women demanded state reforms that would alleviate their concerns as blacks, women, and workers. It chronicles Afro-Cuban women's articulation of citizenship as they addressed the discrepancies between the Constitution and the persistence of discrimination during the 1940s and 1950s, and considers their involvement in international dialogues regarding democratic reform and political stability. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Afro-Cubans' continued struggle to eradicate racial discrimination, which they considered from the vantage point of black women laborers.

By the early 1950s, there were significant changes in both the nature of Afro-Cuban women's activist and intellectual activities, as well as understandings of Cuban citizenship and identity. At the center of my dissertation is the desire to explore the contributions of Afro-Cuban women to Cuban nation formation. From this perspective, nation formation becomes a complex process facilitated by a range of social groups. Race and gender ideologies determine boundaries of citizenship and belonging. Thus, I contend that the formation of a modern Cuban identity rested simultaneously on engaging

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[15] Cited in Esperanza Sánchez Mastrapa, "Informe ante la Comisión de los Derechos de la Mujer" in the "El II Congreso Internacional de Mujeres" (1949). RB 24.9/92 Archivo del Instituto de Historia de Cuba.

dominant narratives and challenging the limitations placed on citizenship and sovereignty. Afro-Cuban women were aware of the limitations of nationalist ideologies, and they pushed for a more expansive definition through which they hoped to gain equality for blacks, women, and the laboring poor.

As such, my dissertation pushes historians of race and gender in Cuba and Latin America to attend to the ways in which identity markers were mutually constitutive in processes of nation and community building. Because race and gender were as important in early twentieth-century Cubans' lives as they were in Cuba's political culture, understanding how race and gender operated sheds light not only on the ideologies themselves, but also on the worlds in which these ideologies operated.

A Note on Terminology

In this dissertation, my usage of racial terminology draws from the racial categories that emerge in my primary sources. *Negro* (black), *pardo*, *mulato* (mulatto), and *mestizo* refer to individuals in several instances. *Gente de color* (people of color) and *raza de color* (the colored race) linked black and mulatto Cubans to a unified community, which I refer to as the community of color. I also use these designations interchangeably with the terms *Cubans of color* and *Afro-Cuban*. Though the term *Afro-Cuban* would not emerge until the 1920s, I feel that the designation acknowledges the persistence of race and racism in defining the experiences of black and mulatto Cubans.

Finally, for the purposes of this project, Mitchell's concept of an "aspiring class" acknowledges the complexity of social divisions along class lines among people of

African descent. In particular, Mitchell utilizes this term to highlight the fluidity of class subjectivities among African Americans at the turn of the twentieth century—as political and economic marginalization limited their access to material wealth and social mobility. Guridy applies the model of the aspiring class to his study of race and the production of social knowledge during the Republican Era. As Guridy explains, "What the notion of aspiring class allows us to do is to underscore Afro-Cuban *aspirations* for upward mobility while recognizing the tenuousness of their economic position in comparison to their white contemporaries."[16] Accordingly, I use the term *aspiring class* to differentiate Afro-Cubans striving for sociopolitical mobility and material gain from elites and white middle-class Cubans. I employ the term *elite* to refer to Cubans of color with inherited wealth, in addition to prominent professionals, politicians, and intellectuals. Not until the 1940s would there exist an established Afro-Cuban "middle class" that was markedly different from the laboring poor. Thus, I utilize these distinctions to emphasize the fluidity of class subjectivities within Cuba during the early twentieth century.

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16 Guridy, "Racial Knowledge in Cuba," 18; and Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation*.

CHAPTER ONE

Patriarchy and Racial Progress within Afro-Cuban Societies in the Early Cuban Republic

In 1902, Cuba became a sovereign nation following the 30-year movement for independence (1868-1898) and succeeding U.S. occupation (1899-1901). Subsequently, "progress" seemed to arise as a national preoccupation among the various individuals—ranging from elite politicians and foreign diplomats to scientists, intellectuals, and activists—who negotiated this period of transition from colony to republic. From personal concerns over social mobility to the larger collective anxieties over demonstrating Cubans' aptitude for self-governance, the idea of progress permeated everyday discourses. Moreover, progress was shaped by racial, class, and gender ideologies—concepts that also informed citizenship and social relationships. In essence, the overarching question of how to determine and monitor *progress* dominated the ways in which most men and women in Cuba understood not only economic prosperity and belonging, but also their personal status within race, class, and gender hierarchies.

This chapter considers how elite and aspiring-class Cubans of color constructed a gendered racial identity through the language of progress during the early decades of the republic. Specifically, it analyzes patriarchal discourses of racial progress as they were embedded in the social and political activities of Afro-Cubans. By the inception of the republic in 1902, the majority of blacks and mulattoes were less than two generations removed from slavery. To these Afro-Cubans, *progress* meant the ability to distance themselves from Cuba's colonial past and the freedom to create a new, modern identity to emerge as true equals in Cuban society. Afro-Cuban clubs or *sociedades* played

fundamental roles in shaping the social, political, and economic lives of blacks and mulattoes. These associations established social hierarchies along gender, class, and, at times, color lines. By looking at the mechanisms of patriarchy and gender exclusion within these organizations—including the terms of membership, society life, and visions of the Afro-Cuban community constructed through publications—this chapter provides insight into the inner-workings of Afro-Cuban life during the early years of the republic. Emphasizing the gendered formation of Afro-Cuban communities, I argue that elite and aspiring-class Afro-Cubans utilized patriarchal discourses of racial progress to pursue mobility and define themselves as citizens.

Cubans frequently invoked the concept of progress to delineate the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion within liberal reforms and state institutions, and ideas of racial and sexual differences permeated conversations regarding citizenship. Although the nationalist rhetoric of racial egalitarianism claimed an all-inclusive, patriarchal understanding of male political rights, social scientists undermined Afro-Cuban social equality by seeking to prove that Cubans of color were too inferior—physically and culturally "backwards"—to engage meaningfully in political participation. Many white elites furthered stereotypes to portray Afro-Cubans as dangerous and criminal. Press reports of black criminality among Afro-Cuban religious practitioners fueled these beliefs by suggesting that blacks and mulattoes were an imminent threat to the security of white elite society. The policing of Afro-Cuban religious practices both within the public and

private spheres served to reinforce such ideas.[17] While whites labored alongside blacks and mulattoes, racial segregation persisted; even within public parks, whites created distinct physical spaces from Cubans of color.[18] Crossing these established boundaries could provoke violence. Thus, these social practices and opinions maintained white ideas of Afro-Cuban inferiority and undermined their rights to full inclusion in society and politics.

Discourses of progress also included the concept of citizenship. Citizenship was defined primarily by the right to vote and the ability to pursue social mobility through education, labor, and politics, and it signaled not only acknowledgement of one's material accomplishments, but also recognition of one's honor and merit. During the movement for independence, slaves and free persons of color fought alongside whites of all classes. Thus, during the Republican Era (1902–1958), Cubans of color pointed to their participation in the independence struggles and the national rhetoric of racial equality in an effort to affirm their right to full inclusion within the public sphere. Within the emerging feminist movement, women asserted their own sense of civic rights and responsibilities by challenging adultery laws, violent spousal subjugation, family abandonment, and divorce laws. While white elites sought to maintain patriarchal racial hierarchies established during the colonial era, Afro-Cuban and feminist activists fought

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[17] David H. Brown, *The Light Inside: Abakua Society Arts and Cuban Cultural History* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2003); Alejandra Bronfman, *Measures of Equality: Social Science, Race, and Citizenship in Cuba, 1902-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Christine Ayorinde, *Afro-Cuban Religiosity Revolution, and National Identity* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004).

[18] Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Frank Guridy, "Racial Knowledge in Cuba: The Production of a Social Fact, 1912-1944" (Ph.D. diss, University of Michigan, 2002).

racist and sexist institutional practices, thus challenging the white male image of the nation.

The early twentieth century also witnessed the extension of United States imperialism in Cuba that shaped visions of progress. Beginning with the War of 1898 that resulted in the U.S. occupation of Cuba and led to Cuba's establishment as a republic through the Platt Amendment (1901), the United States influenced the political and cultural development of Cuba. Historian Louis A. Pérez argues that this saturation of U.S. culture created a political and economic hegemony within Cuba.[19] The strong presence of United States businesses within the Cuban sugar sector and consumer goods market facilitated regular exchanges between Americans and Cubans of all classes. As a result, Cubans began to define themselves in relation to U.S. social hierarchies and understandings of power, including ideas of racial inferiority. They purchased U.S. food, products, novels, and music, and they traveled between Cuba and the United States in pursuit of work, education, and leisure. Though the United States maintained a deeply ambiguous relationship to the Cuban state and its citizenry, its contribution to the evolution of discourses of nation and citizen was significant. Moreover, social scientific ideas of culture and intellect shaped these discourses—framed through the language of race, class, gender, and sexuality—that posited European traditions and Victorian ideals of social behavior as the "acceptable" public practices. The appropriation of U.S. cultural

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[19] Louis A. Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001).

practices, and the implications of that appropriation, occurred within a gendered and racial framework.[20]

For Cubans of color, progress had equally powerful ramifications. While some Afro-Cuban families owned property and were educated during the colonial era, an Afro-Cuban professional class was almost nonexistent during the early years of the republic. In 1901, for example, blacks constituted a mere 3.4 percent of all teachers in Cuba.[21] By 1907, the U.S. War Department reported only one black lawyer, two black physicians, and eight black bookkeepers in Cuba.[22] Historian Alejandro de la Fuente demonstrates that a substantial Afro-Cuban professional class did not materialize until the 1910s. This emerging class actively fought for access to economic, educational, and political institutions. Both elite and aspiring-class Afro-Cubans pursued social mobility by presenting themselves as exemplars of the community of color. They challenged dominant white assumptions of black cultural inferiority through their endeavors for "racial uplift," which emphasized cultural and intellectual self-improvement. In doing so, they utilized the language of progress to distinguish themselves from the uneducated and sexually "immoral" working poor. By presenting themselves as "respectable" men and

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[20] Louis A. Perez, *On Becoming Cuban*. Also See Eileen Findlay, *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870-1920* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Yaven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000).

[21] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 144.

[22] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 116.

women of the community, Cubans of color hoped to gain recognition of their rights to political and social citizenship by the dominant white society. [23]

Patriarchy, Racial Progress, and Social Hierarchy

An examination of patriarchal discourses of racial progress enriches our understanding of Afro-Cuban community and national identity formation, as well as the evolution of politics during the first decades of the republican era. This chapter analyzes patriarchal discourses of racial progress to examine identity formation during Cuba's transition from a colonial to republican society. In contextualizing such discourses within Afro-Cuban organizations, I examine *patriarchy* as "the institutionalized system of male dominance."[24] This approach allows me to focus on the ways in which contemporary gender norms created binary roles for men and women, in particular the ways in which patriarchal social constructions established the public sphere as man's domain, relegating women to the private sphere. Scholars of gender in Latin America conceptualize this dichotomy through the model of house/street.[25] Under this system, men served as the breadwinners of their households and participated in politics; women operated as caretakers who attended to their familial and household duties. Moreover, historians have

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[23] For a description of Afro-Cuban urban communities, see Guridy, "Racial Knowledge in Cuba"; and de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*. On the complexities of political ideologies among Afro-Cuban intellectuals, see Bronfman, *Measures of Equality*.

[24] Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986): 217. Also see Sarah Franklin, "Suitable to Her Sex: Race, Slavery and Patriarchy in Nineteenth-Century Colonial Cuba" (PhD Diss., The Florida State University, 2006): 6.

[25] See, for example, Sandra Lauderdale Graham, *House and Street: The Domestic World of Servants and Masters in Nineteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Lynn K. Stoner, From the House to the Streets: The Cuban Women's Movement for *Legal Reform, 1898-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

shown how race complicated patriarchal social conventions by allowing elites to characterize social value in relation to ideas of honor, respectability, and decency.[26] For instance, during the colonial era, white elites sought to present themselves as the most honorable society members by citing the sexual morality of their wives and daughters (for example, women could leave the home only when accompanied by a male escort). Whites offered two major factors to prove that Afro-Cubans lacked honor: they suggested that blacks and mulattos lacked sexual virtue, citing the existence of unmarried households as justification, as well as the women of color who passed through the streets unaccompanied by a male companion as free and slave laborers; second, they created racial stereotypes that portrayed Afro-Cubans as hypersexual.[27] As constructions of racial and sexual difference persisted into the republican period, patriarchal social conventions informed twentieth-century understandings of manhood and womanhood.[28] Afro-Cuban women continued to confront stereotypes that presented them as immoral and uncivilized within popular culture and social scientific discourses.

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26 Verena Stolcke (Martínez-Alier), *Marriage, Class, and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba: A Study of Racial Attitudes and Sexual Values in a Slave Society* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1974); Sandra Lauderdale Graham, *House and Street: The Domestic World of Servants and Masters in Nineteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Eileen Findlay, *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico,1870–1920* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Ann Twinam, *Public Lives, Private Secrets: Gender, Honor, Sexuality, and Illegitimacy in Colonial Latin America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1999); Sueann Caufield, *In Defense of Honor: Sexual Morality, Modernity, and Nation in Early-Twentieth Century Brazil* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2000).

27 Stolke, *Marriage, Class, and Colour*; Vera Kutzinski, *Sugar's Secrets: Race and the Erotics of Cuban Nationalism (*Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993); Luz Mena, "Stretching the Limits of Gendered Spaces: Black and Mulatto Women in 1830s Havana." *Cuban Studies* 36 (2005): 87-104; Luis Martinez-Fernandez's "The 'Male City' of Havana: The Coexisting Logics of Colonialism, Slavery, and Patriarchy in Nineteenth-Century Cuba"; Vera Kutzinski, *Sugar's Secrets: Race and the Erotics of Cuban Nationalism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993).

28 Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*.

By underscoring the ways in which ideas of gender and racial difference continued into the twentieth century, this chapter shows how elite and aspiring-class Cubans of color employed dominant patriarchal discourses of racial progress to imagine and construct a modern identity. I conceptualize *progress* through the following theoretical assertions. First, progress constitutes a social discourse that is shaped by the socially constructed and interdependent ideas of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Second, it provides a language through which state actors and everyday citizens were able to designate an "ideal" citizenry and set of social norms. This allowed them to regulate others through policing—notably within state reforms and the law, scientific and political discussions of deviance, public protests, and daily gossip and personal critiques—according to understandings of normality and abnormality. Third, while dominant groups utilized the language of decency to socially and politically exclude others, marginalized groups employed it to assert their "respectability" and merit of citizenship rights.

Blacks and mulattoes articulated racial progress as they aspired towards mobility and challenged assumptions of black inferiority within republican society. Utilizing the terms, *mejoramiento* (improvement), *regeneración* (regeneration), *engrandecer* (exalt), or *progreso* (progress), among others, they outlined an agenda through which to uplift the larger community of color. Like other recent scholarship, my analysis of uplift among elite and aspiring-class Afro-Cubans draws upon works by historians who consider African-Americans' struggles for mobility and racial equality during the late-nineteenth

century and early twentieth century.[29] For example, as scholar Kevin Gaines argues, "uplift came to mean an emphasis on self-help, racial solidarity, temperance, thrift, chastity, social purity, patriarchal authority, and the accumulation of wealth."[30] Gaines demonstrates that the ideology of uplift depended upon a unified image of the black community. Elites appointed themselves leaders of the black community who would account for its progress. Gaines adds that uplift ideology was not simply a strategy for African Americans who wanted to be white, but rather "represented the struggle for a positive black identity in a deeply racist society, turning the pejorative designation of race into a source of dignity and self-affirmation through and ideology of class differentiation, self-help, and interdependence." Racial uplift ideals thus served as a form of cultural politics through which African Americans hoped to gain recognition of their humanity by whites. Historian Michele Mitchell contributes to Gaines' discussion by highlighting that gender and sexuality were central to strategies for racial progress. Thus women's roles as virtuous wives and mothers remained a consistent requisite for the progress and "respectability" of the African-American community. The work of Gaines, Mitchell, and others suggests that the language of progress was key to how African Americans asserted themselves into the national public sphere as citizens.[31]

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[29] Guridy highlights the connection between African American and Afro-Cuban conceptions of racial improvement in *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010): 71-78.

[30] Gaines, Kevin, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 2.

[31] Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 3; Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation*. Also see Evelyn Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); and Stephanie Shaw, *What a Woman Out To Be and To Do: Black Professional Women Workers during the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

Within a Cuban context, the idea of racial uplift adequately conceptualizes the goals Afro-Cubans pursued to become recognized as full and equal citizens. Elite and aspiring-class individuals employed progress as they outlined strategies for uplifting their communities. They emphasized cultural refinement, intellectual development, and moral reform. Afro-Cuban associations facilitated the processes of imagining and constructing a collective identity and pursuing individual mobility by establishing boundaries of inclusion and exclusion along the lines of class and gender. Historian Frank Guridy describes that "Afro-Cuban societies posited a gendered understanding of racial uplift that foregrounded the aspirations of black and mulatto men."[32] Indeed, a select group of "enlightened" and "cultured" men assumed responsibility for reforming the race. These leaders sought to affirm their patriarchal honor by uplifting the beauty and intellectual achievements of "exemplary" Afro-Cuban women and scorning others who engaged in behaviors deemed indecent. Women played a subservient role in associational life and rarely held formal leadership positions outside of auxiliary committees. The study of gendered social dynamics within the Afro-Cuban community provides for a greater understanding of how racial and gender ideologies simultaneously operated in the Cuban republic. Moreover, an examination of patriarchal discourses of racial progress offers insight into the ways Afro-Cuban organizations helped to mediate the experiences of black and mulatto women during the period.

[32] *Forging Diaspora*, 74.

AFRO-CUBAN ORGANIZATIONS DURING THE REPUBLICAN ERA: GENDER AND PROGRESS

As the community of color moved away from slavery and into a republican society, elites and members of the aspiring class utilized Afro-Cuban organizations to fashion a new identity in relation to Cuban nationalism, racial ideologies, and discourses of respectability. A tradition established during the colonial era, these *sociedades de color* (colored societies) or *sociedades de instrucción y recreo* (educational and recreational societies) served a variety of functions: civic duty, mutual aid and support, instruction and recreation, literary, and religious.[33] Some, such as the Afro-Cuban Centro de Cocheros, later renamed Our Lady of Charity, were founded during late 1800s and remained active into the twentieth century.[34] Others were created after the end of the Wars for Independence and U.S. intervention in 1898. In Havana alone, more than half of the sixty Afro-Cuban societies registered with the National Congress in 1928 had been formed after 1902.[35] Cubans of color utilized these associations to support their common interests in building kinship and support networks.

Afro-Cuban organizations were central to the formation of communities of color in a society in transition. The early decades of the twentieth century witnessed the expansion of the urban Afro-Cuban population as rural migrants joined established urban

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[33] For a history of Afro-Cuban societies during the colonial era, see Pedro Deschamps Chapeaux, *El Negro en el periodismo cubano en el siglo XIX* (Havana: Ediciones R, 1963); Carmen Victoria Montejo Arrechea, *Sociedades de instruccion y recreo de pardos y morenos que existieron en Cuba colonial: periodo 1878-1898* (Veracruz, Ver.: Gobierno del Estado de Veracruz, Instituto Veracruzano de Cultura, 1993); Philip Howard, *Changing History: Afro-Cuban Cabildos and Societies of Color in the Nineteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998); Ivor Miller, *Voice of the Leopard: African Secret Societies and Cuba* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009).

[34] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 165.

[35] Lawrence J. Gutman, "Imagining Athens, Remaking Afrocubanidad: Club Atenas and the Politics of Afro-Cuban Incorporation" (Masters Thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 2003): 23.

communities that had existed since the colonial era. Yet both urban and rural blacks confronted discrimination that restricted their social mobility.[36] Because these men and women were marginalized due to racial segregation within public establishments and white elite private clubs, joining Afro-Cuban associations provided opportunities for leisure and entertainment. Many organizations met in lodges that became local centers for playing chess or dominoes, drinking and chatting, giving performances, and hosting dances. While leisure and entertainment are important, it was the access to education and political influence these societies provided that made them particularly invaluable during the early decades of the republic. Because the majority of Cuba's citizenry was illiterate during this time, most associations incorporated education and instruction into their programs. For instance, Club Aponte of Santiago de Cuba established a school for boys and girls to prepare them for high school.[37] In Trinidad, the association La Luz created an academy to train their associates "for careers as notaries, land surveyors, bookkeepers, and midwives."[38] Within the political sphere, prominent societies such as Club Atenas of Havana and El Fénix of Trinidad supported candidates throughout their election campaigns. In return, the elected officials were supposed to serve the interests of the community of color by allocating funds to the construction of new lodges or by intervening in cases of discrimination. These political alliances were essential because they provided members "access to and some influence over the political establishment and the distributions of patronage" necessary to obtain white-collar employment

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[36] Guridy, "Racial Knowledge in Cuba," 49-53.
[37] "Club Aponte," Legajo 2660, No. 1, Archivo Histórico Provincial de Santiago de Cuba (AHPSC hereafter).
[38] *Reglamento de la socidedad de instrucción y recreo "La Luz."*

positions. Therefore, Afro-Cuban societies "represented a major route for Afro-Cubans' social and political ascent."[39]

Afro-Cuban societies proliferated throughout the island in both rural and urban communities, and multiple influential associations existed within larger cities. In Havana, Club Atenas and La Unión Fraternal were the most prominent and longest-lasting organizations. La Bella Unión and El Gran Maceo held the greatest influence in the local affairs of Santa Clara's community of color. In Trinidad, the most visible Afro-Cuban associations were El Fénix, La Luz, and La Divina Caridad. The Sociedad Minerva and Albores Sport Club held a similar role in the nearby city of Cienfuegos. In the eastern region of the island, La Victoria, Antonio Maceo, and El Progreso were particularly influential associations among blacks and mulattoes in Camagüey. In Guantánamo, La Nueva Era, Siglo XX, and Club Moncada were the city's three main societies. Likewise, in Santiago de Cuba, Club Aponte, Luz de Oriente, and El Casino Cubano were the most visibly active clubs within the community of color. While most of these associations—at least within formal accounts—claimed to be a-political and non-religious in nature, these organizations boasted well-known leaders, such as senator Juan Gualberto Gómez and poet Nicolas Guillén, who were influential in politics and intellectual circles. Collectively, Afro-Cuban organization leaders—the majority of whom were men—formed a critical base through which they challenged racial discrimination. As they focused on national development and advancing the status of Afro-Cubans, male club

[39] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 163. Also see Guridy, "Racial Knowledge in Cuba."

leaders became exemplary members of the community of color, illustrating the intellectual and moral progress of its most prominent members.[40]

Afro-Cuban *sociedades* members also articulated a gendered agenda for racial progress as they socialized, pursued education, and sought political influence. For elites and members of the aspiring class, progress consisted of espousing racial solidarity and pursuing social mobility as a "respectable" community committed to the nation's development. Being "respectable" required that blacks and mulattoes define their public image in relation to dominant ideas of culture, civilization, and progress—ideas that privileged European and United States social, cultural, and political practices.[41] Often, society members understood this transition as a period of restructuring through education. In the bylaws of the society La Luz, founding members determined the following: "The colored class has recently gotten out of slavery and needs to rebuild itself intellectually and morally. The society, 'La Luz' fulfills this need by socially educating the youth."[42] Intellectuals assumed that slavery had produced a culture deficient of morality. Therefore they charged the younger generation with rescuing the population of color from degeneration through education and cultural development such as poetry writing and musical training.[43] Because they were unable to scientifically and adequately dispute race-based claims of biological inferiority, black and mulatto intellectuals emphasized

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[40] Guridy discusses the role of societies in the development of aspiring-class communities during the First Republic (1902-1933). See chapter two of "Racial Knowledge in Cuba," 34-105.

[41] María del Carmen Barcia, *Capas populares y modernidad en Cuba, 1878-1930* (Habana: Fundación Fernando Ortiz, 2005); Karen Y. Morrison, "Civilization and Citizenship through the Eyes of Afro-Cuban Intellectuals during the First Constitutional Era, 1902-1940," *Cuban Studies* 30 (1999): 83; Alejandra Bronfman, *Measures of Equality: Social Science, Citizenship, and Race in Cuba, 1902-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

[42] *Reglamento de la socidedad de instrucción y recreo "La Luz."*

[43] Guridy, "Racial Knowledge in Cuba," 84.

civic participation and moral virtue as a means of uprising.[44] As a result, prior to the *afrocubanista* movement that promoted African contributions to Cuban culture during the 1920s, elite and aspiring-class Afro-Cubans tended to ignore or reject the African-derived cultural customs that defined Afro-Cuban society because they were assumed to be primitive and uncivilized within dominant culture. Few intellectuals of color openly associated themselves with Afro-Cuban religious organizations and practices, instead focusing on education and public comportment. Together, education and morality constructed an ideology of uplift through which aspiring-class blacks and mulattos sought to bring the laboring poor into society as full and equal citizens.[45]

Gender, Patriarchy, and Respectability in Afro-Cuban Organizations

The work of Afro-Cuban *sociedades* provides key insights into the ways in which communities of color organized themselves as respectable individuals committed to national progress. The following pages highlight the reformulation of an Afro-Cuban identity in a newly formed republic. At stake for blacks and mulattoes was their ability to present themselves as patriotic, capable citizens committed to national progress. State registration records, bylaws, and books and periodicals generated by members of Afro-Cuban societies reveal that understandings of race, gender, sexuality, and class were

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[44] Morrison, "Civilization and Citizenship." While Morrison argues that Afro-Cubans utilized assimilationist tactics to demonstrate their cultural equality to whites, this section suggests that Cubans of color incorporated dominant ideas of culture and progress into the formation of separate social and political institutions. For more on Afro-Cuban ideologies of racial improvement, see Guridy, "Racial Knowledge in Cuba." For further discussion of Afro-Cubans and the idea of civic virtue, see Bronfman, *Measures of Equality*.

[45] Guridy, "Racial Knowledge in Cuba," 84. Also see Kevin Gaines *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics and Culture During the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

fundamental to how elite and aspiring-class Cubans of color perceived both individual and collective advancement.

Who were the men and women forming these associations? Between 1900 and 1958, numerous Afro-Cuban *sociedades* included the professions of male members in their rosters. An analysis of their organizational records suggests a professionally diverse group. For example, one of Santiago de Cuba's most prominent organizations within the community of color, Luz de Oriente, included tobacco workers and urban artisans: carpenters, blacksmiths, painters, barbers, and tailors. They also consisted of businessmen, doctors, lawyers, and pharmacists.[46] The records that document the professions of male members provide insight into the education and class dynamics of the Afro-Cuban elite and aspiring class families. The records also show that the socioeconomic background of many organizations varied; some societies separated themselves by profession, and most used dues to ensure that only individuals with the proper means could seek membership. For instance, in Havana, Club Atenas maintained its elite status by accepting only professionals, while the Unión Fraternal incorporated both professionals and urban artisans into its organization.[47]

Elite and aspiring-class club members hoped to clearly distinguish themselves from the larger, uneducated, and impoverished segment of the community of color by determining their organizations to be respectable and exclusive spaces. Therefore, in addition to establishing membership along professional lines, Afro-Cuban *sociedades*

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[46] "Luz de Oriente," Legajo 2659, No. 2, AHPSC.
[47] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*; Guridy, "Racial Knowledge in Cuba"; Gutman, "Imagining Athens, Remaking Afrocubanidad."

promoted a patriarchal leadership of "recognized" character. Associates emphasized that their members came from *gente decente* (good families). The research of historian Yanira Mesa Jiménez demonstrates that in Santa Clara's Afro-Cuban society, men and women had to meet various requirements— "especially morals, like having good customs and a good reputation"—in order to become associates.[48] Each society published pamphlets that contained guidelines outlining the ways in which individuals could become members, who qualified for membership, the rights and duties of each member, and the penalties for violating organizational and social codes.[49] For example, in 1908, a "group of youths" created Jóvenes de L'Printemps as a social space for the "best" of the colored race.[50] A few years later, Club Atenas announced its intention to classify the colored race in distinct classes. An article published in a 1918 issue of *Club Atenas* declared, "De facto, we, the responsible blacks with established families and culture, are fully capable of practicing our duties and rights as citizens. We are different from those who have an imperfect idea or no idea at all of these social rights and duties. This is the aim of the Club Atenas: to assemble the fit in a single action."[51] Founding member Lino D'Ou Ayallon went so far as to assert that Club Atenas served to demonstrate that "neither all whites nor all black are the same."[52] By outlining a boundary between the "best" and

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[48] Yanira Mesa Jiménez, "Las sociedades 'La Bella Union' y 'El Gran Maceo,' un reto para el racismo de equella época" (Escuela Professional de Arte, Villa Clara, 1993-1994) 5.
[49] Mesa Jiménez, "Las sociedades 'La Bella Union' y 'El Gran Maceo.'"
[50] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*.
[51] *Club Atenas*, 1 January 1918. Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 244. Notably, Guridy identifies a generation gap that occurs within black societies during the 1930s, as the younger generation criticizes the older generation for separating themselves from the masses. See "Racial Knowledge in Cuba."
[52] Cited in Gutman, "Imagining Athens, Remaking Afrocubanidad," 22.

"unacceptable" of the population, society leaders strictly prohibited men and women of the "undesirable" classes from joining their organizations or even attending social events.

Color distinctions could also create internal divisions within communities of color, especially in the eastern region of Cuba, where the population of color was larger.[53] For instance, in Guantánamo, Club Moncada and Nueva Era provided social spaces for mulattoes, while blacks joined the society Siglo XX. Notably, society men and women seemed to establish these color boundaries through social practice rather than official policy—no society document that I consulted defined itself as an organization solely for blacks or mulattoes.[54] While city guides and oral testimonies support that distinct mulatto societies did exist, occasions did arise in which social boundaries became more fluid. In her study of Santa Clara's Afro-Cubans society, scholar Yanira Mesa Jiménez argues that "deep links and relationships" existed between Santa Clara's black society, El Gran Maceo and mulatto society, La Bella Unión.[55] Retired Santa Clara teacher and mulatto Clara Matilde Quevedo recalled during an early 1990s interview her engagement with both El Gran Mace and La Bella Unión: "As a girl I attended an activity in La Bella Unión because they selected me to [perform the Cuban folk dance] La Caringa; I had to convince my father to allow me to go. Later I began to attend El Gran Maceo after getting married in 1949 because my husband Joaquín Montenegro was one

[53] Though 27.7 percent of the island's inhabitants in 1931, non-white Cubans compromised 45.9 percent of the Eastern region's urban population and 53.3 percent of the population in Santiago de Cuba, in particular. See Cuba, *Memorias inéditas del censo de 1931*, 306-315. Also cited in Guridy, "Racial Knowledge in Cuba," 50-51.

[54] In fact, due to the prevailing nationalist discourses that asserted egalitarianism promoted racial fraternity, most Afro-Cuban associations made no use of race in their bylaws.

[55] Mesa Jimenez, "Las sociedades 'La Bella Union' y 'El Gran Maceo.'"

of its associates."[56] Quevedo's testimony demonstrates that women attended society events based on their affiliation with male society members, and it suggests that women's affiliations might have changed as they married or entered into higher social classes.

Maintaining color boundaries, however, did not occur without occasional criticism. In Santiago de Cuba, local black resident Eladio Garzón Carrión published an article in the regional newspaper *Oriente* in which he lamented the status of the Afro-Cuban community. Garzón wrote in reaction to an expose that he read in the newly created newsletter *La invasión de Maceo* (*The Invasion of [Afro-Cuban patriot and general Antonio] Maceo*). According to Garzón, an anonymous *sociedad* founded the periodical to "defend" the patriotic aims of independence hero José Martí to create a racially egalitarian nation and "prove that white Cubans are not racist, but friends of the black race."[57] Moreover, the first edition of *La invasión de Maceo* illustrated that "blacks invalidate themselves due to egocentrism and the lack of unity."[58] Garzón observed that socially the "black race" was divided in black and mulatto groups. In particular, Club Aponte represented blacks, while Luz de Oriente and El Casino Cubano served the social interests of mulattoes. Interestingly, as Garzón declared the "necessity for social reform" among blacks, he posited that the Club Aponte "must change the direction," or "the direction must change the system." He wrote, "We honorable, decent, and moral blacks need to think about the need to unite in social life."[59] He asserted that blacks' ability to unify across class and color lines would be crucial for ensuring the development of the

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[56] Mesa Jimenez, "Las sociedades 'La Bella Union' y 'El Gran Maceo.'"
[57] Eladio Garzón Carrión, "La Invasión de Maceo: Una problema social." *Oriente* 30 May 1923.
[58] "La Invasión de Maceo."
[59] "La Invasión de Maceo."

society. It is possible that Garzón was himself a member of Club Aponte, as he called upon the members of that organization alone to promote "social brotherhood among blacks in their various classes, family organization, economic solvency, and intellectual significance and representation in public life."[60]

Regardless of an individual organization's perspectives on color and class divisions within Afro-Cuban associations, one aspect remained consistent in determining social hierarchies: male leadership. Formally, most societies functioned as patriarchal spaces into which women could only enter as wives, daughters, mothers, or board-approved "socias" of its most "respectable" male members during social and cultural events. For example, La Nueva Era required single women who wished to become *invitadas* (invited guests, rather than full members) to present a written request that was signed by the woman's legal representative *and* guaranteed by a male member.[61] Luz de Oriente stipulated in their bylaws that "people of recognized morality" must accompany *señoritas* who requested to attend parties.[62] Such regulations not only reinforced gendered social norms that limited women's public mobility, they imposed strict public comportment. Like the male "socios," society bylaws dictated that women who attended club functions must adhere to proper social customs and morality. Occasionally, however, societies such as the Unión Fraternal allowed women to participate indirectly through auxiliary groups known as *Comités de Dámas* (Women's Committees). Though seldom documented within official records, auxiliary groups served as distinct

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[60] "La Invasión de Maceo."
[61] *Reglamento de la sociedad de intrucción y recreo "Nueva Era,"* (Guantanamo: Impr. La Universal, 1928).
[62] Legajo 2659, No. 2, AHPSC.

organizations through which women could contribute to the development of Afro-Cuban societies. Women who belonged to these groups elected formal leaders, held fundraisers, and organized parties, as well as other social and educational activities.

During this time, some clubs focused on African culture by promoting and organizing African "cultural aesthetics and ethnic identities."[63] These African-centered cultural societies presented an exception to the gendered stipulations for formal membership. Women constituted the majority of members for the Sociedad de Instrucción y Recreo El Tivolí in 1902. Many women "acted in administrative capacities," though only men served as board members.[64] In addition, the mutual-aid society Our Lady of Charity boasted four hundred female members out of a total of six hundred members.[65] The societies that promoted African cultural activities, however, received heavy criticism from Afro-Cuban intellectuals of the period. Elite Cubans of color saw these members as "African *cabildos*" who needed to become modern through cultural refinement and by promoting decency.[66] Part of this tension likely stemmed from class distinctions, as well as the censure of blackness and African culture within nationalist discourses. Historian Melina Pappademos explains that such organizations, which she terms, "Africanist societies," were "compromised of poorly remunerated, unskilled laborers who sought to strengthen community ties […]."[67] Conversely, the elite and aspiring-class clubs sought to build social networks while also seeking social

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[63] Melina Ann Pappademos, "Alchemists of a Race: Politics and Culture in Black Cuban Societies, 1899-1959 (PhD diss., New York University, 2004): 98.
[64] Pappademos, "Alchemists of a Race," 98.
[65] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 165.
[66] Pappademos, "Alchemists of a Race," 165.
[67] Pappademos, "Alchemists of a Race," 98.

mobility within the dominant framework of progress.

Because the majority of the clubs enforced male patriarchal leadership, they required that women strictly adhere to gender conventions of the period. During the republic, the ideal of womanhood became equated with patriotism, cultural refinement, sexual virtue, and self-sacrifice. In order to enforce contemporary social conventions, Afro-Cuban race reformers encouraged these behaviors among their affiliates. At a celebration for the second anniversary of Club Atenas, member and intellectual Dr. Miguel Ángel Céspedes explained:

> Our women…must be self-sacrificing and long-suffering. As girls, they must be the angels of our happiness, as young ladies, the source of our sweetest dreams, as mothers, loving and protective of our collective health and education, as wives, finally, faithful to sacrifice, and, similar to the pure virgins of pagan Rome, always careful to keep burning in our chests, with their praise and caresses, the lamp of their love's holy flame.[68]

In his discussion of women in society, Céspedes limited women's authority and instead emphasized their unconditional commitment to the family. He emphasized women's roles as daughters, wives, and mothers—positions carried out with love for the wellbeing of their communities. Pappademos notes, "Black women's mobility and social freedom was always regulated by black clubs, either in their bylaws or in the private disparagements easily cast on her character, and, depending on his social and economic or, even political standing, that of her partner as well."[69] Indeed, as dominant culture depicted black and mulatto females as sexually immoral, Cubans of color sought to counter these images by

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[68] Dr. Miguel Angel Cespedes, "Origen, Tendencias y Finalidad del Club Atenas," in *Atenas: Revista Mensual Ilustrada de Afirmacion Cubana, Organio Oficial del Club Atenas* 1 no. 1 (December 1920): 8. Cited in Pappademos diss… 105-6.
[69] Pappademos, "Alchemists of a Race," 111.

demonstrating the Afro-Cuban community's virtue. The patriarchal structures in Afro-Cuban societies on the island resonate with anthropologist Susan Greenbaum's findings on Afro-Cubans in Tampa. As explained by Greenbaum, "Afro-Cubans of both sexes who wished to assert respectability, to contest these stereotypically sexualized and debased images, had little choice but to follow the dominant paradigm of masculine authority, the cloistering of women under the stern discipline of men."[70] Blacks and mulattoes invested in racial progress thus attempted to police the behavior of its women through speeches and articles that provided instruction.[71]

Though establishing strict rules for women's mobility in the public sphere, Afro-Cuban societies provided women with important opportunities for social mobility and leisure activities. Women affiliated with Afro-Cuban associations gained access to patronage necessary for obtaining pensions, education, and defense against racial discrimination. Society networks and events also provided women with opportunities to meet male partners, an avenue for marriage and attaining financial stability. These activities highlight the ways in which women figured into patriarchal agendas for racial progress.

AFRO-CUBAN SOCIAL LIFE DURING THE EARLY DECADES OF THE REPUBLIC

Afro-Cuban periodicals reveal the ways in which Cubans of color utilized community events to help articulate patriarchal discourses of racial progress. Looking at social

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[70] Susan Greenbaum, *More than Black: Afro-Cubans in Tampa* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002): 181.
[71] Pappademos, "Alchemists of a Race," 111.

announcements in the Afro-Cuban press and mainstream newspaper columns, the ever-changing character of the elite and aspiring-classes begins to become apparent. For example, published announcements and event reviews draw attention to the frequent movement of workers, students, lecturers, or vacationers throughout the area. Accounts of local events also note the intraregional movement of performers, such as Los Printemps, or politicians, such as Juan Gualberto Gómez. Social columns advertised upcoming dances organized by women's committees, as well as fundraisers for the construction of new lodges, library books, and educational programs. Editors heralded the work of these "exemplary women" who labored for the betterment of their communities, and often featured photographs of young society women alongside captions that described the subjects as *culta* (cultured), *bella* (beautiful), or *simpática* (nice or kind). Social announcements, therefore, played an important role in promoting the elite and aspiring classes by publicizing organizations and writing about the members and events.

Afro-Cuban periodicals and columns within regional and national newspapers utilized discourses of decency and the ideology of progress to reinforce patriarchal notions of gender and class within the national community and among the Afro-Cuban aspiring class. Published events highlighted the major life events of society members, including weddings, baptisms, graduations, births, and deaths. Whether featured in the Cienfuegos newspaper column of *El Comercio* called "Ecos de Sociedad" or Club Atenas's magazine, blacks and mulattoes utilized announcements to promote an agenda

for cultural and intellectual development.[72] Editors utilized articles, society highlights, and photographs to project models of appropriate social behaviors that would demonstrate Afro-Cubans' abilities to conform to elite social practices. This ideology served several functions. First, it attempted to unify black and mulatto Cubans under a common struggle for social mobility and racial equality. Second, it established a select body of community leaders and drew rigid lines of inclusion and exclusion. In the articles, aspiring-class Cubans of color celebrated Afro-Cuban professionals and politicians from married families, and they reproached the children of illegitimate relationships, the working poor, and others deemed social outcasts. Finally, many Afro-Cuban publications utilized photographic portraiture as visual depictions of cultural and intellectual progress that challenged assumptions of black inferiority and presented a model of "respectable" behavior for all Afro-Cubans to emulate.

Whether the authors hoped to incite audiences to action or to generate shared sensibilities, the social announcements published in Afro-Cuban periodicals and columns within mainstream newspapers enabled black and mulatto families to publicize rituals that both marked life achievements and reinforced their social ties to respectable citizenry. Such broadcasts illustrated the accomplishment of the race and the carefully crafted of graduation, wedding, and performance announcements served as narratives of a community who aspired towards social mobility.

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[72] Most major newspapers featured social columns that announced the activities of the community of color. In many cases, whites and Cubans of color had distinct columns that were identifiable by the title, editor, and names of organizations and individuals cited.

Class, Gender, and Society Life in Santa Clara

Everyone in Santa Clara knew about the "sumptuous" wedding of Margarita Guerra y Guerra and Hermenegildo Ponvert D'Lisle.[73] Described as "a true event in our social world," Lopez Silvero, a columnist for the Afro-Cuban magazine, *Minerva: Revista Universal Ilustrada,* went to great lengths to document the extravagance of the occasion.[74] He noted the beauty of the Plaza de Chao chapel, which was almost too small to hold the "huge crowd" of well-known society members that gathered. Among the more than one hundred guests in attendance were Afro-Cuban luminaries, including Juan Gualberto Gómez, generals Agustín Cebreco and Generoso Campos, representatives Saturino Escoto and Primitivo Ramirez, the mayor of San Fernando de Camarones, Fire Chief Gumersindo Carrera and Chief of Police Josè Cabrera, and the presidents of the local societies El Gran Maceo and La Bella Unión. Silvero noted the attendance of these eminent guests because he felt it was important that readers recognize the cultural refinement of those present. In addition to noting the attendees, Silvero described both the entertainment and menu. Attendees enjoyed musical selections that included the Italian composer Pietro Mascagni's "Ave Maria" and German composer Wilhelm Richard Wagner's march "Logengrin." Guests were "handsomely presented with fine pastries and famous liquors served in silvery cups with bell rims."[75] Following the reception, they enjoyed a "buffet" pasta dinner at the "reputable" hotel Telégrafo. Silvero also listed the gifts acquired by Margarita Guerra y Guerra to commemorate the event.

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[73] Lopez Silvero, "Boda Suntuosa," *Minerva: Revista Universal Ilustrada* April 1915.
[74] "Boda Suntuosa."
[75] "Boda Suntuosa."

The young bride received a variety of gifts with which to begin her new life as a wife, including a silver compact from Juan Gualberto Gómez, a vanity case from Campos Marquetti, and a diamond and emerald pin from the groom's father. The groom purchased Guerra y Guerra's bridal gown, bouquet, and "travel suit." Women gave the bride china and religious relics, including a basin for holy water and an ivory crucifix. The couple also received a "multitude of expressive and heartfelt telegrams from different people of [the province of] Las Villas and the republic capital."[76] Silvero concluded the article by stating that the night of the wedding, the couple left for Havana "in an elegant railroad parlor car."[77]

The coverage of the marriage of Guerra y Guerra and Ponvert D'Lisle reflects how Cubans of color—especially elite and aspiring-class individuals—considered the formation of nuclear households and "virtuous" women within Afro-Cuban communities as evidence that the race had made substantial progress since the end of slavery. The social announcements that covered weddings were merely a part of an interrelated narrative. As elite society members living during the early decades of the republic, the young Santa Clara couple organized their nuptials during an era when race reformers emphasized their cultural refinement, when material status assumed new salience among elite and aspiring-class men and women, and when reformists viewed respectability as essential to racial progress. Guerra y Guerra and Ponvert D'Lisle exchanged rings at a time when Afro-Cuban women and men made a connection between fashion and household décor and their impending entrance into adulthood, leisure status, and social

[76] "Boda Suntuosa."
[77] "Boda Suntuosa."

exclusivity. And, Silvero, who was also a reformist, believed it important to highlight the etiquette of Santa Clara's Afro-Cuban society to illustrate that its members followed dominant gendered and class-based understandings of decency.[78]

Afro-Cuban advancement became as much about attaining material wealth and demonstrating respectability and manners as it was about promoting progress through attacks on racism and the promotion of social education. Elite and aspiring-class Cubans of color flaunted—or at least attempted to project—their opulent lifestyles at social functions by incorporating elite Victorian fashion, dance, and mannerisms in order to demonstrate their cultural advancement. Published coverage of society events routinely detailed the "elegant" location and "exclusive" group of attendees. Dance summaries went into great detail listing the names of each young, "virtuous," and "respectable" woman present, in addition to the men escorted them.[79] For example, the female social group Las Printemps, an extension of the male social organization Los Printemps, announced that it hosted parties with only the "most exclusive" ladies and gentlemen present. They noted the musical performances of violin players and detailed the colors and types of floral displays. Similarly, *Minerva*'s social columnist enthusiastically described the Havana association Club Beneficio's annual celebration at the "luxurious theater," the Vandeville del Politieama, in December 1915. The unnamed female magazine contributor cited the celebration as one of many regular events that took place "in our society of great significance, shining with our natural feminine grace, splendor,

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[78] "Boda Suntuosa."
[79] "Resumen Social," *Minerva: Revista Ilustrada Universal* 30 December 1910.

and artistic beauty."[80] Such reviews demonstrate the ways in which Afro-Cubans club members sought to craft exclusive social spaces and used leisure as a trope for cultural progress.

Displays of cultural refinement and material wealth at community events—through fashion and comportment—connected elite and aspiring-class persons to processes of social ascent, helping to further delineate social boundaries. Thus it is not surprising that exclusive leisure activities were popular among elite and aspiring-class Cubans of color during the early decades of the twentieth century—a time of increased migration and the expansion of the urban Afro-Cuban population, as well as the development of Cuba's economy. These events transformed various forms of public life by providing growing numbers of blacks and mulattoes with greater work and entertainment opportunities. Dances became particularly important venues for such exhibitions. In Santa Clara, the annual "Baile de las Flores" (Flower Dance), which was held each May to celebrate the beginning of the spring, was one of the region's "most anticipated" events. The ball called for specific attire for men and women: Men wore white or light colored suits; women wore gowns of a similar shade. *Muchachas*, or young women, carried bouquets of white or pastel flowers, and many women carried ornate fans as they danced the *danzón* with their husbands or male escorts. One Afro-Cuban resident in Santa Clara, Alferio Noriega, recalled to local historians that everyone purchased elegant new attire for the annual ball, noting that "No one dressed in older clothing."[81]

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[80] "Resumen Social."

[81] Cited in Mesa Jiménez, "Las sociedades 'La Bella Union' y 'El Gran Maceo,'"

The Flower Dance is also featured as an important event in the memoir of Santa Clara Afro-Cuban native Pedro Pérez Sarduy—*Las Criadas de la Habana* (*The Maids of Havana*)—which was based on the stories of his mother, Marta. Narrating Marta's experiences as a young woman during the Republican era, Sarduy wrote, "The Floral Dance was the one all the young people, especially newly-weds, looked forward to each year. For months and months, girls would be planning what to wear as if it were their wedding day."[82] Marta and her friends made sure to arrive stylishly: "We used to hire a carriage which would take us around the city center for an hour or so, throwing out streamers, sounding rattles and cardboard horns—and later as the whole city was festive, people would set off for their great dances in convertibles, hired cars, or horse-drawn carriages along the cobbled streets of the city, which would let off fireworks at midnight from its tallest buildings." Marta noted that the event marked a rare occasion in which working-class Santa Clara residents would flaunt their earnings. She explained, "It was unforgettable, especially when you knew that what you had was worth a year's work, because sometimes the gowns could cost up to 100 pesos and the dances took place three or four times a year, and, like I said before, you wouldn't for the life of you go to two dances wearing the same outfit."[83] *Las Criadas de la Habana* also provides insight into the social boundaries that separated Santa Clara's numerous clubs during the Republican era:

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[82] Pedro Pérez Sarduy, "The Maids," in Eds. Pedro Pérez Sarduy and Jean Stubbs, *Afrocuba: An Anthology of Cuban Writing on Race, Politics, and Culure* (Melbourne: Ocean Pres, 1993): 251. Also see Pedro Pérez Sarduy, *Las Criadas de la Habana* (Editorial Plaza Mayor, 2002).
[83] Pérez Sarduy, "The Maids," 253.

> [My friends] liked to party and to spend wildly on occasions such as the great Floral Dance of the Bella Union Society, which was for colored people. That day there were festivities throughout Santa Clara: at the Grand Maceo Society, for mulattoes and certain wealthy blacks; at the Spanish Casino, the Vedado Tennis Club and at the Lyceum, facing Vidal Park, where the wealthy whites held their celebrations. But we weren't bothered with those festivities because the members of the Bella Union did everything possible so that ours would be the best organized and with the best bands.[84]

Here, Marta's character demonstrates an acceptance of racial and class distinctions without question. Sarduy's account of his mother's life complicates our understanding of the Afro-Cuban community by elucidating that many individuals who attended aspiring-class society events were of the laboring class and had yet to attain economic stability.

Published testimonies reveal rich details that help to reconstruct Afro-Cuban social life during the republican period, illustrating the ways in which Cubans of color understood respectability as they moved between work and leisurely events. Reynaldo González's *La Fiesta de los Tiburones* (*The Feast of the Sharks*) reconstructs early republican society in the city Ciego de Àvila through published documents and oral histories. González incorporates the experiences of Lázaro, a black worker from the neighborhood of Quince. Lázaro observed that the Sociedad Mariana Grajales "threw the best parties in the neighborhood." He explained, "To go to a dance was serious business." Similar to Noriega and Marta's character, Lázaro described the expensive fashions that men and women wore to society dances. In addition, he explicitly stated that dances provided unique opportunities for exposing the character of individuals who attended events: "You knew who was an honest man and who was of the rabble just by their

[84] Pérez Sarduy, "The Maids," 252.

appearance. There were always all kinds of elements, those who did not serve and those who were respected. I, who worked in the fields, would sometimes be covered in red dirt or drenched after a downpour, would never pass through Quince, nor within a ten-block radius, if I wasn't presentable."[85] Lázaro suggested that one's public comportment determined his or her ability to participate in society functions. He cautioned that "If a woman did not maintain the required composure, we would repudiate her. She had to walk straighter because, if she encountered an associate and he perceived her badly, he would report it to the [society's] board of directors. "[86] The first time she might receive a warning, but afterward that "she would be asked politely to leave. No disrepute." Lázaro remarked that men were held to the same standards. As he stated, "Everyone adhered to the regulations [for proper behavior], so that the society maintained good customs."[87]

As Lázaro's testimony illustrates, uplifting Afro-Cuban morality depended upon society members' ability to protect themselves from those who engaged in sexual relations deemed improper and promoting a rigid understanding of feminine virtue. Government records demonstrate that associations did indeed expel their members for improper conduct. During the 1920s, a group of male members of the Santa Clara society El Gran Maceo filed a complaint with the provincial government for having been

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[85] "Usted sabia quien era hombre honesto y quien era chusma nada mas que por la facha. Siempre hubo todo tipo de elementos, el que no servia y el que se respeta. Yo, que trabajaba en el campo y a veces me embarraba de tierra colorada o me enchumbaba un aguacero, no pasaba por el Quince, ni a diez cuadras a la redonda, si no iba presentable." Reynaldo González, *La Fiesta de los Tiburones*, 3rd Edition (Havana: Ciencias Sociales, 2001).

[86] "Si una mujer no guardaba la debida compostura, la repudiabamos. Tenia que andar derechita, porque un socio la veia en un mal paso y reunia a la derectiva. Decia lo que habia visto y llamaban a capitulo. La primera vez le advertian y, despues, pisaba bonito a la sacaban. Nada de despretigio. Los hombres, lo mismo. Todos guardando la forma, que la sociedad existia buenas costumbres." González, *La Fiesta de los Tiburones,* 109.

[87] González, *La Fiesta de los Tiburones,* 109.

expelled from the society for bringing an uninvited female guest to a recent dance. Board members of the organization had become concerned about the decision of many society members and *señoritas* to attend parties sponsored by organizations other than El Gran Maceo. Fearing that the association of some members with clubs that board members viewed as less respectable would diminish their own reputation, El Gran Maceo affiliates sought to carefully regulate who could or could not attend their social events. Months after the filled complaint, leaders of the society held an emergency board meeting to establish formal regulations and guidelines dictating the public comportment of El Gran Maceo's affiliates. Additionally, the organization's male leadership stipulated that "no young lady can be considered an invited guest if she works as a cook or maid in any establishment of private home." Historian Frank Guridy contends that the events demonstrate the extent to which elite blacks and mulattoes asserted their worthiness by distancing themselves from the masses.[88]

Afro-Cuban associational life in Santa Clara shows how elite and aspiring-class individuals sought to enact racial progress through the policing of black men's and women's behaviors. By crafting exclusive social spaces along the lines of class and sexuality, elites and members of the aspiring-class sought to distance themselves from the laboring poor. Leisure and displays of material wealth further enforced these boundaries. Yet they also helped to project an individual's respectability and social mobility. An examination of Afro-Cuban social life highlights that formal distinctions outlined in the process of establishing organizations spilled into the daily lives of Cubans of color.

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[88] These events are discussed in further detail in Guridy's "Racial Knowledge in Cuba," 99-101.

A SHIFT IN DISCOURSE: MORALITY

Following the violent repression of the black political party Partido Independiente de Color (Independent Colored Party) in 1912, Afro-Cuban intellectuals continued to critique racial discrimination within their publications. However, they shifted from debating the utility of a race-based political organization to evaluating the behaviors of the masses by focusing on women, the family, and moral education as part of a larger movement for Afro-Cuban unification. Indeed, unification became a major theme among young Afro-Cuban elites during the mid-1910s. During this period, a younger generation of society members attained elite status as professionals, many of whom had developed strong political connections to the Liberal and Conservative parties. This emerging class heavily criticized established societies for their lack of "decency" and modern sensibilities.[89] While this discussion was not new—*El Nuevo Criollo* writers addressed acts of immorality and uplifted the family between 1904 and 1906—the articulation of racial progress within Afro-Cuban publications and organizational records reflects a significant change within Afro-Cuban societies. Elite leaders posed two strategies for unifying the community of color: establishing an umbrella organization that would advocate for political influence, though not as a distinct political party; and creating a "large 'new' and 'modern' society that, through the 'scrupulous selection' of its members, would guarantee what members of the Afro-Cuban middle class envisioned as an adequate representation of their race between Cuban authorities and society."[90] Both

[89] Guridy, "Racial Knowledge in Cuba," 165.
[90] Guridy, "Racial Knowledge in Cuba," 166-168.

visions limited membership to elite men of color and utilized respectability discourses to assert their superiority to the largely poor Afro-Cuban masses.

Women, the Family, and Racial Regeneration

Journalist Ramón Vasconcelos' column, "Palpitaciones de la Raza de Color" ("Palpitations of the Colored Race"), exemplified unification debates that addressed the family, sexual virtue, and racial progress within Afro-Cuban periodicals. Published almost daily in the national newspaper *La Prensa* between 1915 and 1916, "Palpitaciones" contributors "suggested that Afro-Cuban men 'gallantly' take their 'rightful' place as the heads of their households as they also became involved in the leadership of their communities."[91] In August of 1915, Vasconcelos (penname Tristán) explained that women presented the greatest challenge to the regeneration of blacks:

> The black woman, almost always of little grace, may be hurt by the contempt that the rest deduce by being the most virtuous. They suffocate her strength. The *mulata*, in exchange, the meat of pleasure for excellence, ascends for everyone, white from all the desire, but falls more frequently than all. She has the highest rate of prostitution. Half of the *mestizas* begin, some thirty percent of those that prostitute themselves and only ten percent of those that marry. The remainders live an unclassified existence, given that without being widows, wives, nor *solteras*, are everything.[92]

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[91] Karen Morrison, "And Your Grandmother, Where is She?: Reproducing Family, Race, and Nation in Cuba" (PhD.diss., University of Florida, 2003): 313.

[92] "La negra, poco agraciada casi siempre, mas maltrada por el desden que las demas concluye por ser la mas virtuosa. A la fuerza ahorcan, La mulata, en cambio, carne de placer por excelencia, asediada por todo el mundo, blanco de todos los apetitos, cae con mas frecuencia que todas. Da el mas elevado porcentaje de prostitucion. La mitad de las mestizas se amanceban, un treinta por ciento de las que quedan se prostituyen y solo un diez por ciento se casan. Las restantes llevan una existencia inclasificada, dado que sin ser viudas, casadas ni soleteras, lo son todo." "Tres Puntos." *La Prensa*, 16 August 1915.

Vasconcelos faulted women as "the greatest obstacle in the regeneration of blacks" in his newspaper column.[93] He viewed women of color as intellectually and morally deficient in comparison to their white counterparts and believed that black, mulatto, and *mestizo* women possessed varying levels of virtue. He also acknowledged that a lack of education had led women of color to their sexually indecent positions. He thus challenged the respectable members of the Afro-Cuban population to "prepare women for the fight against the evil limitations" of the lower classes.[94] Vasconcelos called upon men to "restore" women to the home, as their "great mission" to uplifting the race lay within the domestic sphere.[95]

As referenced by Vasconcelos, many Afro-Cubans blamed women for degenerating the community of color because they perceived a large number of women to be prostitutes or the mistresses of white men.[96] "Palpitaciones" contributors often chastised what they perceived as the sexual immorality of black and mulatto women. In September 1915, Caridad Chacón de Guillén, a reader from Havana, submitted a letter to Vasconcelos entitled "Mi Opinión" ("My Opinion"). She wrote, "…your opinion about the carelessness with which many women of our race see marriage, and how they are easily delivered to the brothel is one that has my approval."[97] A former Ladies Committee president for the society Divina Caridad, she suggested that "Palpitaciones" readers "need not be alarmed" that a man of color would criticize the sexual indiscretions

[93] "Tres Puntos."
[94] "Tres Puntos."
[95] "Tres Puntos."
[96] There is no statistical data that estimates the number of prostitutes who were of Afro-Cuban descent.
[97] Caridad Chacón de Guillén, "Mi opinion," *La Prensa* 30 September 1915.

of black and mulatto women, for these critiques "should be said." Chacón felt it was important that "one understand the difference between being the wife of a poor immaculate man who lived honestly, versus being an unnamed concubine."[98] Chacón enthusiastically supported reform through "moral education," proposing that Afro-Cuban societies hold conferences to "remedy" the widespread social problem.

Women of color were instrumental in creating a discourse of the family and moral reform, though their perspectives varied throughout the early-twentieth century. Yet not all women of color supported the assumption that women contributed to the degeneration of the community of color. In an especially charged letter written in 1915, Indiana (penname), an Afro-Cuban reader of "Palpitaciones," attacked Vasconcelos for arguing that women of color lacked virtue. She considered his perspective to be a "great injustice" to the number of accomplished women living throughout the island.[99] Indiana reminded Vasconcelos that, on average, women of color were more literate than their male counterparts. As she refuted Vasconcelos' thesis on Afro-Cuban women's sexual morality, Indiana affirmed woman's central role in ensuring progress within the home, clarifying that, "woman's duty is to educate and guide the family in the home in the path of duty."[100] Similar to Chacón, Indiana believed that the moral education of woman was "the one and only base that supports all virtues." She agreed that women had been ordained to manage the education and guidance of the family as mothers, wives, and caretakers. However, she contended that the real problem lay not in women's sexual

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[98] "Mi opinion."
[99] Indiana, "Reflecciones Femeninas," *La Prensa* 31 August 1915.
[100] "Reflecciones Femeninas."

behaviors, but in the relationship between husbands and wives. Indiana critiqued men for creating abusive households and, therefore, undermining the institution of marriage. As she explained, "…it is man who, when he should respect [a woman], insults her, and, when he should elevate her, humiliates her."[101] This dynamic, she claimed, was the real reason for which half of women decided to cohabitate. Indiana asserted that only when men learned to be more respectful towards their partners, complying with their "duties" as husbands and gentlemen, so that their behavior would "accurately reflect" that the woman was their wife, would more women choose to marry. She concluded that "There is no intellectual progress without moral education, and within the respect and homage that virtue deserves, one can not feel the horror of vice..."[102]

One column contributor, Joaquín N. Aramburu, placed his hopes for racial reform in the hands of strong patriarchal figures, proclaiming that that "We need hard-working black men, virtuous and unassuming families, happy homes, and decent customs to demonstrate our progress, civic aptitude and competence to live a life of liberty…"[103] Aramburu's article underscored that the "virtuous" family, coterminous with the domestic sphere, was key to the advancement of the community of color. And when he called upon black men to guide their wives and children toward moral improvement, Aramburu understood that the promulgation of the legal family unit held political ramifications for a people seeking social acceptance.

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[101] "Reflecciones Femeninas."
[102] "Reflecciones Femeninas."
[103] Joaquin N. Aramburu, "Baturrillo," *La Prensa* 9 September 1916. Also cited in Morrison, "And Your Grandmother, Where is She?," 314.

Arturo Gonzáles Dorticós, another "Palpitaciones" contributor, believed that the challenge of regenerating Afro-Cuban families lay in overcoming social obstacles created during the Colonial Era. Focusing on the "moral culture" of the population of color, Dorticós' article "Premisas" asserted that slavery had particularly affected Afro-Cubans' ability to develop strong households. As he explained, "Slavery… greatly reduced the moral level of the individual […]."[104] He acknowledged that some slaves were allowed to marry. However, he asserted that married slave couples were in the minority. Dorticós feared that the practice of becoming a concubine, which was maintained for centuries, was "the reason for which many Cubans of color rejected marriage." He was troubled that, almost fifty years after emancipation, many men of color "lived years lain with a woman, but would hardly legalize that union."[105] Such men failed to take into account "not only the prejudice that proportions to the society in which they live for the creation of a family without legal representation," but also "the shame of those sons that, even with the knowledge that they have a father, can hardly carry his name, but suffer in silence the stigma that society throws them, because of their condition of being bastards."[106] Thus, while Aramburu promulgated patriarchal leadership of the family as a strategy for community uplift, Dorticós implied that black men's failure to marry produced deeply personal struggles for their children who sought to be recognized as full citizens.

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[104] Arturo Gonzalez Dorticos, "Premisas," *La Prensa* 5 November 1915.
[105] "Premisas."
[106] "Premisas."

As Afro-Cuban men and women participated in discussions about the number of illegitimate children being born within the community of color, Dorticós despondently noted that a major consequence of immoral family structures among Cubans of color was a lack of respect from whites. He felt that whites' refusal to recognize the honor of Afro-Cuban men was "not the fault of whites, but our fault."[107] Nor was it the fault of women of color. He blamed black and mulatto men for their ignorance and complained that most did not take the issue of matrimony seriously. He determined the time had arrived for Cuban men of color to regenerate themselves. Dorticós concluded, "Let us respect ourselves mutually, respect families, our women, and in place of losing them, let us try to educate them and separate them from the descent in that which by our fault they have found themselves; but to the contrary, will not have our right to complain, nor require, nor to blame anyone from his motivated perdition no more than, for our degeneration for that which we will do worthy only from the most solemn contempt."[108] The concern with illegitimate children may not have been exclusive to blacks and mulattoes, but Afro-Cuban race reformers carried out the movement within the community of color, focusing on the obligation of men and women to establish strong, moral families.

Contributors to the column, "Palpitaciones" highlighted the intersection of sexual morality and the family in legal terms, utilizing the domestic sphere to articulate a vision of progress. These debates paralleled the establishment of new societies among elites of color, many of which sought to distance themselves from existing societies by

[107] "Premisas."
[108] "Premisas."

emphasizing the high morality of its members. For instance, the Agrupación de Asaltos Jóvenes del Vals formed in 1916 to hold selective parties for no more than fifty members of "irreproachable morality and behavior."[109] One year later, Luz de Oriente of Santiago de Cuba declared that "persons of recognized morality" must accompany single women interested in attending parties.[110] Such declarations demonstrate that elite Cubans of color became increasingly concerned with regulating the behaviors of their associates, seeking to restrict those who violated the proscribed social behaviors from attending club events. By articulating patriarchal discourse of progress through which they projected their superiority over other blacks and mulattoes, elite society members strengthened their ties to elite white politicians and intellectuals. As de la Fuente argues, "by the end of the 1920s Afro-Cuban elites had developed the institutional means to assert their presence in Cuban society and politics."[111]

CONCLUSION

Through their active social and political associations, Afro-Cubans formulated ideas of progress during an era in which Cuba was experiencing a transition from colony to republic, leaving definitions over citizenship in flux and subject to constant debate. The nationalist rhetoric proclaimed all Cuban men to be equal regardless of their racial identifications. However, Cubans of color who confronted discrimination in employment and public spaces such as parks and hotels quickly realized that race would play a major

[109] de la Fuente, *A Naiton for All*, 166.
[110] Legajo 2659, No. 2, AHPSC.
[111] de la Fuente, *A Naiton for All*, 166.

role in determining who had access to political power and social mobility. Elite and aspiring-class society members of color protested acts of racial discrimination throughout the early years of the republic. In addition, they sought to exemplify their merit for citizenship rights by becoming educated and demonstrating their "respectability."

As they pursued equal political representation and social equality, elite and aspiring-class Afro-Cubans articulated patriarchal discourses of racial progress within clubs and during social events. Indeed, *sociedades* provided a model through which they could police the expanding aspiring class by linking individual social behaviors to collective progress. Afro-Cubans organized their organizations along class, gender, and at times, color lines. Women were rarely official members, but rather affiliates connected to Afro-Cuban clubs through their familial connections as wives and daughters. Class, gender, and color distinctions also shaped social interaction among Afro-Cubans. Individuals who attended weddings, concerts, and parties wore elegant clothing that would illustrate their material attainments. Society leaders required that those who attended their events receive prior approval based on their public reputation. Those who violated the required codes of morality and cultural refinement could be thrown out. Afro-Cuban society leaders drew from their patriarchal understanding of racial progress to enforce boundaries of inclusion and exclusion.

Elite and aspiring-class Cubans of color concretely and discursively constructed women's gender identities within the paradigms of caretaker, instructor, and sexual morality. Maintaining "respectability" or "decency" often resulted in attempts to police the behaviors of Afro-Cuban women by black and mulatto men, especially as elite Afro-

Cubans gained political influence during the 1920s. Cognizant of stereotypical images of women of color as sexually deviant, prone to criminality, and inadequate mothers, Afro-Cuban male intellectuals considered the community's "respectability" as contingent upon women's ability to conform to prescribed social norms. Such concerns over black and mulatto women's sexual behaviors demonstrate that the contestation of racial ideologies directly informed the role of Afro-Cuban women within the public sphere. Chapter 2 focuses on how black and mulatto women articulated patriarchal discourses of racial progress in relation to evolving gender ideologies of the early twentieth century. It demonstrates that women of color committed themselves to racial uplift, yet they also engaged evolving gender ideologies that outlined the role of women in the nation's development.

CHAPTER TWO

Exemplary Women: Afro-Cuban Women's Articulation of Racial Progress

The establishment of the Republic in 1902 ushered in new gender ideologies that helped to reformulate women's roles within the public sphere. As intellectuals and lawmakers sought to create a modern democratic society that differed from Cuba's colonial system, they initiated legal transformations that altered understandings of womanhood.[112] Whereas, during the colonial period, male patriarchs served as the legal guardians of women, by the late 1910s, reformists promoted women's education and new family legislation in an attempt to exclude the Catholic Church from politics. Women gained the right to manage their own property, file for divorce, receive alimony, and maintain authority over their children. More women attended universities and obtained professional careers as teachers, nurses, lawyers, and journalists. During this time, education, labor, and suffrage became central issues through which they articulated understandings of republican womanhood.[113] Yet despite the rights they gained, women activists chose to utilize their prescribed roles as wives, mothers, and moral gatekeepers to assert their civic responsibilities rather than challenge patriarchy.[114]

Racial ideologies were intricately tied into evolving gender understandings. Assumptions of black inferiority created during the colonial era continued into the early twentieth century. In a variety of settings: from social science studies to the realm of

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[112] K. Lynn Stoner, "On Men Reforming the Rights of Men: The Abrogation of the Cuban Adultery Law, 1930," *Cuban Studies* 21 (1991): 83-99. Also see Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*.
[113] Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*; Julio Cesar González Pagés, *En busca de un espacio: historia de mujeres en Cuba* (La Habana: Ediciones de Ciencias Sociales, 2003).
[114] See Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*, 10.

popular culture—including literature, political caricatures, and advertisements—black and mulatto women were frequently depicted as sexually immoral and uncivilized. These depictions contrasted drastically with the representations of elite and middle-class white womanhood, which encompassed characteristics that ranged from piety to modern refinement. Distinctions in the characterization of white and Afro-Cuban women served as justification for Afro-Cuban women's social and economic marginalization. Even when they created their identities in relation to dominant ideas of republican womanhood, black and mulatto women continued to be placed outside the bounds of respectable womanhood. Therefore, women of color had as much at stake in pursuing racial progress as their male counterparts.

This chapter analyzes the role Afro-Cuban women played in the making of patriarchal discourses of racial progress during the early years of the republic. Elite women of color worked within the gendered structures of exclusion to forge their understandings of racial progress in relation to evolving gender norms. They increased their opportunities to exercise social power by writing for Afro-Cuban periodicals such as *El Nuevo Criollo* (1904–1906), *Ecos Juveniles* (1909–1910), and *Minerva: Revista Ilustrada Universal* (1910–1915). Black and mulatto women contributed to debates on citizenship and national identity formation, asserting a woman's right to attain an education and uplift her community through moral instruction and intellectual development. Numerous elite and aspiring-class women also wrote letters to major political figures in search of educational and employment opportunities, access to state pensions, and help in addressing racism. As such, I contend that women of color used

literary venues to pursue both individual and collective advancement, even while articulating patriarchal discourses of racial progress.

As recent scholarship has shown, notions of respectability and decency figured prominently in projects of racial improvement during the republican era.[115] Within the field of Cuban women's history, scholars highlight that modern state transformations granted women new rights and opened opportunities to serve as state builders.[116] While such studies of state formation and national identity are key to understanding the construction of race and gender, few have considered the contributions of Afro-Cuban women to social and political discourses. Such works miss crucial opportunities for analyzing how women of color helped define patriarchy and social dynamics within the Afro-Cuban community, as well as how racism placed Afro-Cuban feminists in a precarious position when addressing legal reforms that pertained to women's rights and the family. This chapter expands studies of blackness and womanhood to include the written contributions of black and mulatto women.[117] It elucidates that Afro-Cuban women participated in contemporary discussions that highlighted the nexus between race,

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115 Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Frank Guridy, "Race as Social Knowledge in Cuba: The Production of a Social Fact, 1912-1944" (Ph.D. diss, University of Michigan, 2002); Karen Y. Morrison, "Civilization and Citizenship through the Eyes of Afro-Cuban Intellectuals during the First Constitutional Era, 1902-1940," *Cuban Studies* 30 (1999): 83.

116 K. Lynn Stoner, *From the House to the Streets: The Cuban Women's Movement for Legal Reform, 1898- 1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); Julio González Pagés, *En busca de un espacio: historia de mujeres en Cuba* (La Habana: Ediciones de Ciencias Sociales, 2003); Esperanza Méndez Oliva, *La estirpe de Mariana en Las Villas* (Santa Clara: Editorial Capiro, 2006). Also see, María del Carmen Barcia, *Capas populares y modernidad en Cuba, 1878-1930* (Habana: Fundación Fernando Ortiz, 2005).

117 This chapter also disproves literary scholar Dawn Duke's assertion that "Constructing the history of black women's writings in Cuba proves difficult because prior to anthologies by María Dámasa Jova there seems to be no available records that have survived." See, *Literary Passion, Ideological Commitment: Towards a Legacy of Afro-Cuban and Afro-Brazilian Women Writers* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2008): 57.

citizenship, and gender norms, and fused their racial uplift aspirations with ideas of republican womanhood. Black and mulatto women confronted racial and gender oppression by asserting their intelligence and respectability as women committed to national progress. They created a public voice as moral leaders of the patriarchal household, as well as caretakers who merited access to education and material resources in order to ensure the wellbeing of themselves and their families.

This chapter also analyzes the writings of Afro-Cuban women feminists who published in the Afro-Cuban publication *Minerva: Revista Ilustrada Universal* (*Minerva: Universal Illustrated Magazine*) between 1910 and 1915. Historian Ula Taylor's concept of community feminism best addresses how women of African descent addressed both racial and gender oppression through their activist and intellectual activities. Taylor defines *community feminists* as women who, living within or outside of patriarchal households, fought to uplift male and female members of their communities. From this perspective, all of the women discussed in this chapter were community feminists. However, I reserve the term for women who self-identified as feminists and who engaged the feminist movement through *Minerva*'s feminist pages. Recalling historian K. Lynn Stoner's analysis of white middle-class and elite feminism, Cuban feminism asserted its right to influence political reforms within the patriarchal framework of the family and women's roles as wives and mothers. However, Afro-Cuban community feminists did not pursue social reforms solely for the betterment of families or Cuba. Rather, communitarian values of progress informed their methods: social education, political activism, and public comportment became strategies for uplifting the Cubans of color as a

community.[118] Thus, I define feminism among elite Afro-Cuban women as the belief that women's active involvement in struggles for social reform, as citizens who helped educate and organize the community, was necessary for attaining racial equality and ending gender oppression.

The feminists writing for *Minerva* were neither radical nor unusual within contemporary feminist discourse. As argued by Stoner, "Cuban feminism drew from traditional notions of femininity and a rejection of gender equality to advance a cause that assumed that women's roles were necessary for social progress."[119] Afro-Cuban women who defined themselves as feminists—similar to middle-class and elite white feminists writing for the women's magazines *La Mariposa* of Trinidad, *Aspiriaciones* or *La Sufragista* of Havana, and *Revista de la Asociación Femenina de Camagüey*—advocated women's empowerment *within* the framework of established gender roles. Yet most mainstream women's magazines featured the political and social activities of white women while excluding the contributions of Afro-Cuban writers and social leaders. An examination of Afro-Cuban feminist thought helps to integrate the perspectives and contributions of Afro-Cuban women into the history of gender and the feminist movement in Cuba.

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[118] For further discussion of community feminism, see Ula Y. Taylor, "'Negro Women are Great Thinkers as Well as Great Doers': Amy Jacques-Garvey and Community Feminism in the United States, 1924-1927," *Journal of Women's History* 12 (Summer 2000): 104-126.
[119] Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*, 1.

Racial Progress and Republican Womanhood

My analysis of Afro-Cuban women's writings underscores the intersection of racial progress and understandings of republican womanhood. I define *republican womanhood* in relation to the evolving rights and social behaviors expected of women during Cuba's transition from a colonial to a democratic society. *Mambisas* (women rebels in the Wars for Independence) demonstrated their commitment to national development during the nineteenth-century movement for independence by entering the battlefield, taking care of soldiers, and supporting their sons and husbands who joined the rebel forces.[120] During the early twentieth century, women activists drew upon visions of revolutionary womanhood to demarcate their role in the Cuban Republic. In the process, they created a concept of womanhood that affirmed dominant cultural norms that relegated women to the domestic sphere as caretakers. Thus, women's contributions to the development of the nation lay in their ability to raise their sons to be active citizens. As explained by historian K. Lynn Stoner, activists "attempted to fuse concepts of feminism, motherhood, and nationalism, thus creating a place for themselves as Cuba's moral political leaders."[121] Understandings of republican womanhood drew from patriarchal ideals and encompassed women's socially ascribed roles through a range of political perspectives, ranging from liberal to conservative philosophies.

As individuals of African descent, elite and aspiring-class women of color created a public voice for themselves as republican women committed to racial advancement.

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[120] Teresa Prados-Torreira. *Mambisas: Rebel Women in Nineteenth-Century Cuba* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2005); Jose Sanchez Guerra. *Mambisas guantanameras* (Guantanamo: Centro Provincial del Libro y la Literatura: Editorial El Mar y la Montana, 2000); Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*.
[121] Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*, 55.

Though black and mulatto women used similar notions of republican womanhood, their racialized identities created an experience that greatly differed from their white feminist counterparts in important ways. I therefore follow the theoretical approach established by scholar Hazel Carby, who argues the following regarding African American women novelists: "[…] in order to gain a public voice as orators or published writers, black women had to confront the dominant domestic ideologies and literary conventions of womanhood which excluded them from the definition 'woman.'"[122] Carby's assessment is useful for understanding the ways in which women of African descent understood their subjective positions in relation to prevailing racial ideologies that positioned them as counter to republican womanhood. Carby proposes that scholars examine black women's writings not only "by the social conditions in which they were produced but also as cultural artifacts which shape the conditions they enter."[123] She demonstrates that their intellectual traditions thus represented "an attempt to define the political parameters of gender, race, and patriarchal authority."[124] I draw from Carby's insights and underscore that black and mulatto women writing during the early twentieth century acted as agents who both affirmed and protested contemporary ideologies, thus articulating a distinct social position informed by their racial, gender, and class status.

Elite and aspiring-class women of color utilized their public voice to achieve racial progress and the expanded rights of women. Class ideologies and privileges played

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[122] Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergency of the Afro-American Novelist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989): 6.
[123] Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, 95.
[124] Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, 97. Also see Michelle N. Garfield, "Literary Societies: The World of Self-Improvement and Racial Uplift." In Kristin Waters and Carol B. Conaway, Eds., *Black Women's Intellectual Traditions: Speaking their Minds* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2007): 113-128.

a key role in their writing practices. Most women discussed in the following pages were elites who came from families with professional or urban artisan backgrounds. Some families had been educated for generations, while others had members who were among the first to attend college. Although elite families were educated and often employed as professionals, the majority of Cubans living during the early years of the republic worked in nonprofessional sectors and earned lower incomes. Afro-Cubans overall were underrepresented in the professions throughout the Republican era and, thus, compromised a small percentage of the population.[125] Indeed, socioeconomic distinctions could produce radically different experiences within the community of color. However, the activism and intellectual work of elite and aspiring-class Afro-Cubans is crucial for understanding how racial and gender oppression limited blacks' and mulattos' social mobility and political representation during the republican period.

Elite and aspiring-class Cubans of color created various understandings of Afro-Cuban womanhood as they articulated a patriarchal agenda for racial progress. As male editors and society members sought to "police" the community of color—particularly the behaviors of women and the working poor—women employed the rhetoric of progress to define and challenge women's roles as caretakers, educators, and community leaders. In addition to focusing on gendered and class-based forms of racial uplift, women highlighted the role of blackness and womanhood that was evolving in relation to shifting gender dynamics. Therefore, black and mulatto women articulated an understanding of modern womanhood through which they sought expanded opportunities within the public

[125] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 153.

sphere. Moreover, even as women employed multiple strategies to pursue advancement—whether addressing racial manhood as members of the Partido Independiente de Color (Independent Colored Party, PIC), examining gender roles within a feminist framework, or writing letters—the patriarchal model of the family remained central to how they understood gender roles.

REPUBLICAN WOMANHOOD AND THE WORK OF RACIAL IMPROVEMENT

Elite black and mulatto women articulated patriarchal discourses of racial progress within Afro-Cuban periodicals and mainstream newspaper columns throughout the early decades of the republic, creating a distinct public voice during Cuba's transition from a colonial to a democratic society. During this period, Cubans of color emphasized that education was essential for transcending the vestiges of slavery and attaining social mobility. For many, writing served as an extension of their social activities that were geared towards uplifting their communities through education and moral instruction. At the same time, elite women began to challenge traditional gender norms established during the colonial era by suggesting that their expanded rights would contribute to Cuba's modernization. They underscored their moral superiority as caretakers, which they used as leverage to debate issues that included labor, family reform laws, and suffrage.[126] Linking both social undertakings, elite Afro-Cuban women utilized published articles, poetry, and short stories to illustrate their new roles as republican women committed to racial advancement.

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[126] K. Lynn Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*; Gonzáles-Páges, *En Busca de un Espacio*.

Evidence suggests that few elite Afro-Cuban women published novels and biographies in their pursuit of intellectual development. Instead, it was the publication of poetry, short stories, and essays in Afro-Cuban periodicals that created the substantial body of literature that informed and instructed women in advancing themselves and the race. The large number of available newspaper articles suggests that women had more access to write for periodicals and fewer opportunities to publish their own books. This stems from the fact that newspapers reached a wider audience; they were affordable and accessible through subscriptions and street vendors, or they were passed from one person to another. Social announcements and printed letters to the editors demonstrate that most Afro-Cuban publications were read by local society members and affiliates, as well as by society associates in cities and towns throughout the island. For example, the Havana periodical *Minerva: Revista Universal Ilustrada* advertised events taking place in Matanzas, Santa Clara, and even Tampa, Florida. As dynamic texts that held a variety of purposes, newspapers and magazines at once spread and codified values. Therefore, as Afro-Cuban periodicals promoted literacy and intellectual development, they helped disseminate a shared vision of progress.

Writing Republican Womanhood

Elite Afro-Cuban women promoted intellectual and cultural development by writing for Afro-Cuban periodicals and freestanding newspaper columns. For instance, between 1904 and 1906, Salie Derome and Úrsula Coimbra Valverde wrote for Rafael Serra's newspaper *El Nuevo Criollo*. Angelina Edreira and María Latapier de Céspedes served on

the editorial board of *Minerva*. Ana Hidalgo Vidal of Cienfuegos wrote for both the Afro-Cuban magazine *Labor Nueva* and Ramón Vasconcelos' column in *La Prensa*. María G. Sánchez of Cienfuegos also wrote for *Labor Nueva*. While many served as contributors and editors, others established their own periodicals. Cienfuegos was the birthplace for numerous magazines: Ana Hidalgo Vidal helped found *Páginas Literarias*, and Ana Joaquina Sosa y Gonzáles founded the *La Familia*, the first periodical edited and run by a woman.[127] These and other women writers helped to articulate ideas of racial uplift and republican womanhood in relation to broader social and political reforms.

Úrsula Coimbra Valverde exemplified women of color who sought to demonstrate that racial progress supported the notion of women's participation in the advancement of the race. Valverde, a musician and distinguished writer, belonged to a prominent family from Cienfuegos. Her writings appeared as early as the 1880s, when *Minerva* featured a sketch of the young artist along with a short biography.[128] She relocated to Santiago de Cuba following her marriage to Nicolás Valverde. A classically trained musician, she regularly performed and taught piano. Coimbra served as an active member in the elite community and worked for the cultural development of its members. Social highlights from Santiago's newspapers announced her concert performances and her involvement in other society events over the span of several decades. Women of the elite mulatto society of Santiago de Cuba, Casino Cubano, organized a major tribute to honor her contributions in 1946.[129] In addition to her musical endeavors and career as an

[127] María del Carmen Barcia, *Capas populares*, 138.
[128] "Nuestras Colaboradoras," *Minerva* 15 December 1888.
[129] *Oriente* March 1946.

educator, she published articles on community politics, feminism, and women's roles in the Afro-Cuban magazine *Minerva*.[130]

In addition to articles on gender and community development, Coimbra also published a series of essays entitled "La Mujer en la Poesía Cubana" ("Women in Cuban Poetry") in *El Nuevo Criollo*, the daily newspaper printed in Havana by the Afro-Cuban patriot Rafael Serra. Using the pseudonym "Cecilia," Coimbra strove to demonstrate women's aptitude within the liberal arts and challenge false assumptions of male intellectual superiority. Highlighting the work of women poets from the colonial period that included Rafaela Vasquez and Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Coimbra disputed the belief that women should not study. Instead, she proclaimed that women would triumph against the passions and weaknesses of men through education. Coimbra positioned herself firmly against patriarchal perspectives that discouraged female education. She asserted that women had historically participated in the arts and produced scholarly work. Coimbra's essays identified and examined Cuban women's writings as a scholarly tradition that exemplified their intelligence.

While Coimbra's outline of women's poetry emphasized the contributions of all women, the author underscored the intellectual capabilities of women of color. For Coimbra, women were entitled to intellectual development, as it was a part of black women's cultural heritage. She particularly lauded the accomplishments of Juana Pastor, an educated *mestiza* born during the late eighteenth century, who became a professor and

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[130] "Salve Minerva!," *Minerva* 15 October 1911; "Párrafos del Alma," *Minerva* 14 March 1912; "Nostalgia," *Minerva* 30 July 1912.

"one of the most distinguished ladies of her time."[131] She implied that Afro-Cuban women's intellectual production was a significant achievement given the historical contexts in which many of the works had been created. Coimbra explained, "although all of [colonial] Cuba's inhabitants were then slaves of their government, the black woman was doubly enslaved."[132] She adamantly claimed that race and gender created a distinct social burden, exemplified by the legal enslavement of black women. It was a "glory" that "a *mulata* had been the precursor of the most pretty and beautiful of the arts, such as poetry."[133]

Coimbra's articles on education and the history of Cuban women poets, then, couched progress in racial and gendered terms. By examining the work of Cuban women poets, she not only emphasized black women's talents as writers, she also asserted that education was essential to preparing women to become active participants in a modern society. The link between women and intellectual development made her writings, in both tone and purpose, a representative example. Coimbra highlighted the stories of exemplary women of color to argue for their merits for receiving a formal education. No doubt she recognized that an education could afford women the rare opportunity to work outside of the home as professionals, gaining opportunities to pursue advancement as they embraced visions of modern womanhood.

Coimbra's call for women's education elucidates that many Afro-Cuban women considered individual improvement to be a crucial step towards collective progress, a

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[131] "La mujer en la poesía cubana, I," *El Nuevo Criollo* 15 October 1904.
[132] "La mujer en la poesía cubana, I."
[133] "La mujer en la poesía cubana, I."

perspective that would evolve during the early years of the republic. By 1915, women, including Cienfuegos journalists Ana Hidalgo Vidal and Maria G. Sánchez, took Coimbra's vision one step further by asserting women's civic responsibilities. Hidalgo proclaimed to the female readers of "Palpitaciones de la Raza de Color," the Afro-Cuban column of *La Prensa*: "Only when we have loyally interpreted our rights and duties … when we fix our attention on our own advancement and the advancement of the rest, only then will we have accomplished the first step of progress."[134] Invoking the role of women in the effort to reform the community, she outlined a set of rights and duties that entitled women to lead alongside men. Similarly, in the article "Accionemos," Sánchez asserted that women were more apt than men to overcome the difficulties necessary to achieve progress. Sánchez brazenly challenged assumptions that women of color were intellectually and morally inept. Instead, she asserted that women were predisposed—demonstrated by their intelligence and sympathy—to ensure national and racial triumph. As such, Sánchez felt that women were entitled to feel the "the owner of herself."[135] She stressed that women should posses a home where they might freely act and feel in control of their destiny. As Sánchez called women of color to action, she placed herself in political accord with numerous Afro-Cuban women who understood education as a right within republican society.

In addition to the right to an education, elite Afro-Cuban women's understandings of republican womanhood entailed their commitment to racial progress through intellectual activities and by instructing others. For example, women affiliated with the

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[134] Ana Hidalgo Vidal, "¿Es mejor no meaneallo?" *La Prensa* 10 November 1915.
[135] Maria G. Sánchez, "Accionemos." *Labor Nueva*.

Santiago de Cuba society Club Aponte led weekly evening classes for girls and young single women.[136] In Santa Clara, society affiliates Antonia Marrero de Noreita and Eloisa Mesa de Barrios headed the all-women's honorary board of the Asociación de Enseñanza "El Porvenir" ("The Future" Teaching Association) in 1910. Established by the elite Afro-Cuban society men of Santa Clara, the association appealed to the "lovers of the intellectual progress of our youth."[137] Graduates of the association went on to attend the Villa Clara provincial high school, and one young man attended the University of Havana. The organization continued to expand throughout the early twentieth century, announcing a search for a new location and establishing a library for its members to "read eminent authors."[138] Women remained active in El Porvenir as educators and editors of the association's magazine *Ecos Juveniles*. Beyond educational institutions, many women traveled the island to advocate on behalf of Afro-Cuban instruction. In 1911, feminist intellectual Gloria Alonso visited Cienfuegos to argue for the importance of formal education.[139] These brief examples highlight that black and mulatto women employed a variety of positions as they took an active role in promoting intellectual development.

Afro-Cuban women frequently praised each other for their work in uplifting their local communities through instruction and literary production. For example, one might look at an excerpt of the Santa Clara resident Violet's 1910 poem, "A Moraima," published in the Afro-Cuban magazine, *Ecos Juveniles*:

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[136] "Club Aponte," Legajo 2660, Expediente 1, AHPSC.
[137] "Asociación de Enseñanza 'El Provenir,'" *Ecos Juveniles*, 1910.
[138] "Asociación de Enseñanza 'El Provenir.'"
[139] *Minerva*. 1911.

Por el bien de su pueblo y de su raza
Lucha esta joven con afan constante;
Ella forma la Gloria de su casa
Avanzando con pasos de gigante.

Si; es Moraima la que con su anhelo,
Rindiendole homenajes al progreso,
Nos hace desechar el desconsuelo,
Nos hace abandonar el retroceso.

Su lucha con el Libro es conocida;
Su aspiracion sublime esta colmada;
Abriose paso en la penosa vida
Y hoy se ve de laureles coronada.[140]

For the sake of her people and her race,
This young woman fights with constant eagerness.
She is the glory of her house
Advancing with giant steps.

Moraima, with her longing,
Pays tribute to progress;
Helps us reject despair
Helps us abandon backward movement.

Her struggle with the book is known
Her noble aspirations filled.
She opens a path through life's difficulties
And today she is crowned with laurels.

In this poem, Violet exalted the work of Moraima Quintero, an editor of *Ecos Juveniles* from 1908 to 1910. Violet likened Quintero's book to the struggle for community uplift and development, praising a female writer of color for her commitment to intellectual endeavors. She emphasized Quintero's commitment to "her community and her race"; the book served as her weapon with which to "fight with constant desire."[141] Asserting that Quintero had "advanced" her people away from degeneration "with giant steps," Violet

[140] Violet, "A Moraima," *Ecos Juveniles* 1910.
[141] "A Moraima."

declared that Quintero helped her community overcome the "grief" and "backward movement" of a marginalized population that struggled with illiteracy and impoverishment. As she praised Quintero's "tribute to progress" on behalf of the community of color, she affirmed women's commitment to the wellbeing of society.[142]

The edited publications of Moraima Quintero elucidate that many elite women of color formulated understandings of racial progress by writing poetry and short stories, demonstrating their intellectual and cultural refinement. Poetry especially enabled women to write creatively through rhyme, syntax, and verse while engaging social themes that included gender norms, patriotism, and cultural memory. Published in the Afro-Cuban biweekly newspaper *Labor Nueva,* Guanajay resident and intellectual Inocencia Silveira's tribute to her father represents the intersection of these themes. Entitled "A mi Padre" ("To My Father"), her poem included the following stanzas:

> Eres mi padre, en la extensión del Mundo,
> Quien más me quiere con amor profundo;
> Y eres, pues me lo indica mi conciencia,
> El gran faro que alumbra mi existencia.
>
> Yo admiro de tu vida las acciones
> Y prometo seguir tus instrucciones,
> Porque no hay, a mi ver, placer mas grande
> Que hacer aquello que el deber nos mande
>
> En mis versos no hay notas inspiradas
> Pues carezco de gracia y de talento;
> Pero en cambio, se ven, aqui expresadas,
> Apreciaciones que en mi ser sustento.
>
> You are my father, in the expanse of the world,
> Who else loves me so deeply?
> And you are, as my conscience tells me,

[142] "A Moraima."

The great light that illuminates my existence.

I admire the actions of your life
And I promise to follow your instructions,
Because, in my opinion, there is no greater pleasure
Than doing that which we are sent to do

In my verses there are no inspired notes
Because I lack the grace and talent;
But instead, the appreciations expressed here
Can be seen sustained in me.[143]

In "A mi Padre," Silveira affirms her father's commitment to his family. She notes that his love is unique and unconditional. As such, he serves as the "great light" that illuminates her existence in the world, defining her relationship to society. Recognizing the strengths of her relationship with her father, Silveira uses poetry to exalt his achievements as a patriarchal leader and veteran of the war for independence. She sought to follow in his footsteps by working for the betterment of society as the mission that she had been "sent to do."[144] By writing a poetic tribute to her father, Silveira not only identifies with patriarchalism, she also connects herself to a legacy of patriotic and racial uplift activism established by Cubans of color.

Patriotism also served as an important theme through which Afro-Cuban women writers articulated patriarchal understandings of progress and they affirmed nationalist sentiments by addressing Cuba's struggle against Spanish colonialism. In a 1910 poem titled "El 27 de Noviembre" ("November 27th") published in *Minerva*, feminist intellectual Cristina Ayala reflected on the 1871 execution of eight medical students during the Movement for Independence. The medical students had been falsely accused

[143] Consuelo Silveira, "A mi Padre," *Labor Nueva*.
[144] "A mi Padre."

of effacing the tombstone of a Spanish journalist. The Spanish governor brought them to trial, and they were found guilty and sentenced to death before a firing squad. The students' death was recognized as a national day of mourning, and Cubans saw the anniversary as an opportunity to reflect on the brutality of the colonial government.[145] Ayala thus contributed to building cultural memory as she commemorated the event in a poem:

> Al ver que sin respeto para su edad florida
> ni para su Inocencia, ¡les troncharon la vida,
> y en un montón infecto, como podrida escoria,
> los que eran para ella esperanzas de glorias,
> quedaron hacinados, sin poder la ternura
> de sus amantes padres, Cristiana sepultura
> dar á sus pobres resortes que, rígidos y frios
> fueron escarnio y burla de soldados limpios.
>
> Esa es la triste fecha que hoy Cuba conmemora,
> hoy; la que al recordaría, con Honda pena llora
> y junto al llanto acerbo por su dolor vertido,
> de mi lira enlutada escúchase el gemido;
> y en una endecha triste cual la melancolía,
> le digo: yo comparto tu duelo, Patria mía![146]
>
> Seeing that without respect for your florid age,
> or your innocence, they cut your life!
> and in a great infection, like a rotten slag
> those who were her hope for glory,
> were overcrowded, without the tenderness
> of their loving parents, Christian burial
> to give your poor to concerns that, hard and cold
> were the derision and mockery of clean soldiers.
>
> That is the sad day that Cuba commemorates today.
> Today one will remember, with deep painful cries
> and through bitter tears pours their pain,
> my lyre hears the mournful wail;

[145] Cristina Ayala, "El 27 de Noviembre" *Minerva* 15 November 1910.
[146] "El 27 de Noviembre."

and in a sad and melancholy dirge
I say: I share your grief, my fatherland!

Ayala recalled the violent occasion that led to the death of the young students. She depicted the event as a senseless tragedy that occurred "without respect" for the lives of those killed. She emphasized the humanity of each, describing that their lives were "cut" while still in the stage of innocence. Ayala invoked a somber picture of the brutal process through which they died "without the tenderness of their parents,"[147] their lives reduced to a mockery by the colonial government. Ayala concluded by aligning herself with the pain that all Cubans felt on the anniversary.

Cristina Ayala and Inocencia Silveira's patriotic poems venerated heroic male figures during a period in which Cuban nationalism was still in its infancy. Though nationalist discourses emerged during the nineteenth century, Cuban writers of the early republic articulated gendered and racial understandings of the nation in relation to contemporary struggles against Afro-Cubans' marginalization in politics. As previous studies demonstrate, Cubans of color were dismayed by the realization that they had fought alongside their white counterparts during the independence movement only to confront racism that undermined their rights and mobility in the early twentieth century.[148] Afro-Cuban veterans felt that their contribution to the Cuban republic was not justly realized. Their protests underscored issues raised by Cubans of color living

147 "El 27 de Noviembre."
148 See Serafín Portuondo Linares, *Los independientes de color* (La Habana: Editorial Caminos, 2002); Tomás Fernández Robaina, *El negro en Cuba, 1902-1958. Apuntes para la historia de la lucha contra la discriminación* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1990); Jorge Castellanos and Isabel Castellanos, *Cultura Afrocubana* 4 vols. (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1990-1994); Helg, *Our Rightful Share*; de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*.

throughout the island, including racial discrimination in employment, labor exploitation, limited educational opportunities, and unequal representation in government. In this context, Silveira's tribute to her father worked to affirm his contributions as a war hero and honorable society member. While Silveira asserted her father's role in the formation of the nation, Ayala memorialized several Cuban martyrs on a national day of remembrance. Both women used poetry to help build an Afro-Cuban history. As such, in addition to articulating patriarchal understandings of racial progress in relation to patriotism, both women contributed to the development of popular literature, albeit in ways unrecognized by larger society.

Intellectual and cultural uplift became crucial for women of color who asserted their capabilities in a society that excluded them from the category of respectable womanhood. The small number of formally educated Afro-Cuban women used their knowledge to instruct others, found periodicals, and publish poetry. In the process, elite women of color worked to create a modern understanding of womanhood informed by racial ideologies by fusing racial progress discourses with ideas of republican womanhood in their writings. As the following sections demonstrate, elite Afro-Cuban women also articulated patriarchal understandings of racial progress as activists affiliated with the black political party Partido Independiente de Color and burgeoning feminist movement.

WOMEN OF THE PARTIDO INDEPENDIENTE DE COLOR (INDEPENDENT COLORED PARTY)

The motivations of women who supported the Partido Independiente de Color (Independent Colored Party, or PIC) were manifest in their patriarchal understandings of racial progress. The PIC was perhaps the most prominent Afro-Cuban organization in the period, an autonomous political party that, in partnership with the Conservative Party, threatened the control of both elite white and Afro-Cuban Liberal Party politicians over the black electorate.[149] The PIC, founded by war veterans Evaristo Estenoz and Pedro Ivonnet in 1907 had by 1910 come under attack by political leaders who asserted that the group undermined Cuba's national unity. While historians have shown the ideological contradictions between the members of the PIC and Afro-Cuban *sociedades*, they have not yet documented the salient resemblance with gendered understandings of racial improvement. Similar to the rhetoric of racial improvement those Afro-Cuban club leaders articulated, PIC members also emphasized intellectual development, respectability, and patriarchal gender relations in their political and social activities.

PIC members sought the right to pursue personal development and collective rights within the independent Cuban nation that they had helped to create. Initially founded as the Agrupación Independiente de Color, the PIC supported Afro-Cuban veterans marginalized within the military and labor sector and argued that the government had failed to ensure the citizenship rights of the community of color. The party included individuals from across the island in both urban and rural areas. Members ranged from day laborers and peasants to artisans. The PIC thus primarily consisted of

[149] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 71-77.

the poor and aspiring classes, rather than elite Afro-Cubans. As noted by historian Aline Helg: "What singled out the Cuban Partido Independiente de Color was also the class proximity between its leaders and rank and file. Neither highly educated nor wealthy, the *independiente* leaders made demands that were in line with the demands of their followers." [150] During the PIC's brief existence between 1908 and 1912, Estenoz and Ivonnet created one of the most radical platforms of any political party of their time. They established the party not as a personal dispute with white Cubans, but "for the compelling reason that we love the independence and the democratic institutions that have been granted by Cuba's revolutionary heroes, in virtue of those by which [Cuba] is now a free and sovereign nation."[151] Moreover, as explained by historian Serafín Portuondo Linares, the *independientes* argued as one of their central motives that "the race had not been able to achieve, by its own efforts, a degree of *advancement* capable of achieving 'the moral and material consideration' of their counterparts living in the republic."[152]

Certain constants informed the political philosophy of the PIC as its leaders pursued racial improvement and political development. When initially founded, the party primarily focused on championing the right of veterans and their families to receive pensions, highlighting the sacrifices made by soldiers of color to ensure the independence of Cuba. Some PIC members asserted that Cuban independence would have been inconceivable without the large, voluntary participation of blacks and mulattoes in the

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[150] Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 4-5.
[151] Cited in Portuondo Linares, *Los independientes de color*, 37.
[152] Portuondo Linares, *Los independientes de color*, 37. (My emphasis.)

Liberation Army. Cubans of color Estenoz and Ivonnet also challenged racist practices within the military in which white soldiers were routinely promoted over their equally qualified peers. Party members generally recognized that the marginalization of Afro-Cuban veterans mirrored the lack of government interest in the development of the broader community of color. Thus, by advocating on behalf of veterans of color, the PIC helped to establish a large base of support throughout the island that would benefit the Afro-Cuban population. The PIC later expanded their agenda to include representation in government, justice before the law, free and obligatory education, universal instruction, labor reform (including eight-hour workdays), open immigration to all races, and, "as a moral issue," the "revision and fiscalization of all of the expedients made effective during the first American intervention conceived to date."[153]

Patriarchy and Women's Contributions to the PIC

While progressive in terms of its proposals for labor reform and holding the legal system accountable, the PIC remained traditional in its expectations of women. Indeed, PIC members promoted a similar class-based gender dichotomy that ensured community respectability by relegating women to the domestic sphere. As Helg argued, "The *independientes'* [PIC members'] campaign did not concede new rights to women. Whereas native and foreign white women entered some new professions faster than Afro-Cuban men, male leaders of the PIC reasserted that the right place for a woman was at

[153] Serafín Portuondo Linares, *Los independientes de color* (La Habana: Editorial Caminos, 2002): 39-41.

home serving her husband and raising her children."[154] Women thus participated in the PIC in a manner similar to that of their role in the societies El Gran Maceo, Unión Fraternal, and Casino Cubano: they held secondary leadership positions, organized social events, and helped to raise funds within auxiliary branches.[155] Moreover, the PIC newspaper, *Previsión*, promoted women's leadership in relation to the patriarchal family structure. For example, several articles within the "women's pages" provided tips for maintaining the home and serving as the proper hostess. A series of articles entitled "El trato social" ("Social Behavior") advised women to assent to their husbands' judgment so that 'male pride would not be hurt.'"[156]

PIC discourses that uplifted virtuous womanhood and the patriarchal family structure took on particular significance within a political culture in which white elites frequently depicted Cubans of color as obstacles to progress. During the early twentieth century, white politicians reacted to the raced-based organization by identifying PIC members as a threat to national public security. In particular, they circulated rumors of "racist," anti-white conspiracies that might result in a "black takeover" similar to the slave insurrection that led to Haiti's independence in 1804.[157] Additionally, published criminal cases and scientific studies drew upon images of the black rapist and black *brujo* (witch) to suggest that Cubans of color in general served as a danger to white women and

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[154] Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 148.
[155] In fact, numerous issues of *Previsión* featured a list of Afro-Cuban societies throughout the island that had members who supported the PIC.
[156] "El trato social. La Mujer," *Previsión* 20 December 1909. Also see Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 149.
[157] Aline Helg, "Black Men, Racial Stereotyping, and Violence in Cuba and the U.S. South at the Turn of the Century," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42 (2000): 576-604.

children. These depictions became particularly visible in the press coverage of several major crimes that linked the disappearance and murder of numerous white children to black and mulatto practitioners of African-derived religions. No doubt men and women of the PIC were aware of such representations that presented blacks and mulattos as part of an outlaw class. Thus, the image of respectable Afro-Cuban womanhood demonstrated the *independientes*' ability to conform to hegemonic conceptions of citizenship.

Though no statistical data identifies the number of women involved, women of color supported the PIC with the goal of eradicating racial inequalities and pursuing social advancement. Similar to the aspiring-class societies, many PIC chapters established women's auxiliaries. Identified as the *Dámas Protectoras de los Independientes de Color*, each auxiliary regularly elected officials. Women's auxiliaries supported the party by organizing dances to provide entertainment and raise funds for the organization. Moreover, women recruited other women into the organization. Their efforts helped the PIC grow quickly; by 1910, chapters existed throughout the island and abroad in communities that included Key West and Tampa, Florida.

Women of the PIC also contributed to the development of party politics by submitting letters and articles to *Previsión* that affirmed the party as an important vehicle for pursuing racial improvement. In 1908, in the face of criticism from those who frowned upon race-based politics, a woman from Holguín submitted a letter to *Previsión*, the newspaper of the black political party, the Partido Independiente de Color (Independent Party of Color, or PIC). In her letter, the "Holguinera" (as she referred to herself) defended the need for an Afro-Cuban political party. Having determined that the

Moderate Party of President Tomás Estrada Palma had failed to adequately address the routine acts of racial discrimination that occurred within the government and labor force, she asserted that Cubans of color needed a political organization that would protect the interests of the race. Moreover, the Holguinera believed that men of color should separate themselves from the Liberal and Conservative political parties if only to maintain their dignity. Fully endorsing the PIC, the Holguinera wished for "the triumph of our race in the upcoming elections."[158]

The Holguinera's views were neither unusual nor extreme within the political discourse of Cubans of color who supported a black political party as a strategy for individual and collective racial advancement. As the daughter of parents who worked "for the betterment of themselves," the Holguinera saw her successes, and the successes of others, as key to the progression of the race, yet institutional racism stymied her progression on at least two occasions.[159] The Holguinera explained that her husband had received numerous medals following his involvement as a soldier in the wars of 1868 and 1895. However, decades later, he remained a captain while whites with less accolades were promoted to the status of colonels. The Holguinera herself studied to become a teacher, but she was unable to attain a position in which she could practice her profession. Meanwhile, though she lost two brothers in the independence movement, the sisters of white veterans had secured employment in the same vocation. The Holguinera drew upon the professional experiences she and her brother encountered to illustrate how racism prevented her family from realizing their goals for self-development. Her analysis

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[158] Una cubana holguinera, "Una Carta" *Prevision* 30 October 1908.
[159] "Una Carta."

of the success of white soldiers and their families reveals the frustrations that many Cubans of color experienced when seeing equally or less-qualified whites receiving privileged access to positions of employment and state veneration as veterans. Angered and disconcerted, the Holguinera proclaimed her hopes for a "complete triumph" of the *independientes*.[160] Therefore, the Holguinera's critique of racism within Cuba's political culture mirrored the grievances identified by other members of the PIC.

Women affiliated with the PIC articulated gendered understandings of racial progress in their letters and articles published in *Previsión* that affirmed Afro-Cuban manhood. In March 1910, Eulalia Morales, a reader of the newspaper, submitted a letter that praised the intellectual labor of *Previsión*'s male and female writers. She expressed the "immense pleasure" that "seized her soul" when seeing the spiritual strength of male contributors who published critiques of racism and government corruption.[161] Morales believed that their engagement with national politics on behalf of the community of color marked "a glorious stage for our race," from which would come the birth of "our wellbeing in the future." Then shifting her focus to *Previsión*'s women contributors, she praised individuals such as Rosa Brioso, a PIC leader from Oriente, for confronting "all of the impossibilities of the difficult work that has been entrusted to us."[162] As Morales distinguished women's work from that of men, she recognized women for encouraging the men of the PIC "from the columns of *Previsión*." For Morales, women's work in service of the community ultimately served to uplift its men. As a result, she praised

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[160] "Una Carta."
[161] Eulalia Morales, "Senoritas, senoras y caballeros" *Previsión* 26 March 1910.
[162] "Senoritas, senoras y caballeros."

women for their "self-denial" in addition to their faith and enthusiasm as they exalted the work of the race.[163]

As they uplifted the mission and leadership of the PIC, women writing for *Previsión* engaged in a gendered understanding of progress that incorporated a patriotic dialogue regarding politics, history, and racial-identification. A young Afro-Cuban woman from central Cuba, Julia Argüelles de García received *Previsión* from her godparents, Juliana García de Castañeda and Fernando Castañeda. Argüelles heralded the magazine as "the triumph of rights, peace, and reason." Residing within the district of José Martí, Argüelles de García grew up in the town of Manacas where "with great pleasure that athlete, that bronze titan they call Antonio Maceo made use of the word of honor." In her homage to the Cuban nation, Argüelles de García emphatically connected herself to the terrain of revolutionary heroes. Contrary to white and even some Afro-Cuban critiques that a racial democracy and black political party contradicted each other, Argüelles de García invoked the legacy of Cuban heroes in order to identify herself as *both* a supporter of the PIC and national discourses.

As suggested by Argüelles' letter to *Previsión*, many women connected themselves to Cuban heritage through national narratives of revolutionary heroes. The proud daughter and granddaughter of Cuban natives, Emilia Gamboa Cuzá claimed Cuba as her homeland through familial connections in addition to her birthplace. Gamboa's personified tribute to the island recognized that Cuba had rejected "the invasions of many races," and affirmed its independence for the honor and wellbeing of its children. She

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[163] "Senoritas, senoras y caballeros."

wrote, "I love you with all of my soul and I am proud of having been born on your ground and to call myself your daughter." On behalf of its sacred land, Gamboa promised to study and work "tirelessly" with her "little intelligence," serving her country by fighting to foment its richness and extend its "blessed name" throughout the earth.[164] Gamboa did not employ a radical message that promoted a black republic, but rather an explictly nationalist one that fell in line with dominant discourses.

While Gamboa asserted her role in uplifting the nation, contributor Carmen Piedra charged men with uplifting the nation. Piedra asserted that men of color possessed the high honor of being men. Historically, their sex obligated them to serve when needed by their homeland, as their country called them to abandon the duty of their homes and shed blood. Yet, despite making such contributions, Piedra asked why men of color retreated from the "beautiful walk of exalting our race and liberating us from the moral slavery in which we live sinking?" [165] Ordained by God with the title of *man*, Piedra believed that black men should challenge white men to recognize their civic responsibilities to protect their families and nation, as well as valuing men of color. She continued, "If I possessed such a beautiful title of 'man,' I assure you all that I would be one of the most fervent fighters for conquering the rights of our race." Thus, the time had arisen to "lift the veil" that shielded them from their duties.[166]

Women writing for *Previsión* frequently exalted PIC leader Estenoz as the model of patriotic manhood. In 1910, for example, Carmelina Bequer of Palmira urged blacks,

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[164] Emilia Gamboa Cuza, "A mi patria," *Previsión* 20 February 1910.
[165] Carmen Piedra, "A los hombres de color" *Previsión* 5 March 1910.
[166] "A los hombres de color."

"by instinct of conservation," to follow the teachings of Estenoz.[167] Bequer supported Estenoz's demands for the integration of Cubans of color into society within a government structure that protected the rights of blacks and mulattos. She valued his mission to have Cuban society recognize the humanity and civilization of the Afro-Cuban population. Moreover, Estenoz's message of political empowerment and racial uplift stood in line with personal goals. By affirming his agenda for racial advancement, Bequer heralded Estenoz as the most important figure of the period to defend the "heroic and suffered race."[168]

Bequer's veneration of black manhood as community leaders entrusted with racial advancement took on particular significance as Cuban politicians worked to legally ban the organization. The political elite repeatedly circulated rumors of a "black conspiracy"—asserting that the PIC was racist and aimed to create a black republic similar to that of Haiti—in order to mock, repress, and undermine the party's influence from its establishment in 1907 through the early 1910s.[169] During September 1908, Liberal and Conservative party members joined forces by bringing two hundred supporters to disrupt an *independientes* meeting held in Havana. This event only fueled tensions between the PIC and government. In January of 1910, *Previsión* printed an open protest against the discrimination of blacks within a Havana hotel owned by North Americans. As explained by Helg in her study of the PIC, the government responded with

[167] "A los hombres de color."
[168] "A los hombres de color."
[169] See Helg, *Our Rightful Share*.

immediate action by seizing *Previsión* and arresting Estenoz.[170] A jury sentenced Estenoz to six months' imprisonment. As protesters demanded the release of Estenoz, Afro-Cuban senator Martín Morúa Delgado proposed a bill that would outlaw the PIC and prohibit the organization of any political group on the basis of race. Widespread protests resulted in Estenoz's pardon by President Jose Miguel Gómez within a month. However, Morúa's campaign to ban the organization by appealing to the rhetoric of racial equality succeeded. Following the passage of the 1910 Morúa law—the legislation that outlawed the party—PIC members found themselves subject to increased harassment and even prosecution before the law. As men faced political persecution, women writing for *Previsión* deemed men's commitment to the organization as patriotic and essential to the progress of the race. Bequer thus encouraged Estenoz not to falter in his endeavors, as he would soon be remunerated.[171]

Among the women writing for *Previsión*, Rosa Brioso became one of the most prominent activists within the PIC community to promote racial progress. Brioso's leadership began in Santiago de Cuba, and by 1910 she had become the national leader of the Damas Protectoras del Partido Independiente de Color.[172] Like Bequer, Brioso ardently defended black patriotic manhood. She frequently compared Estenoz and the Afro-Cuban independence war hero Antonio Maceo and lauded them as champions of "equality within the homeland."[173] Similar to his predecessor, Maceo, Estenoz was among the great political leaders who risked jail and combat in pursuit of equality and

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[170] Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 164.
[171] *Previsión* 5 March 1910.
[172] "De Santiago de Cuba," *Previsión* 15 February 1910.
[173] "Una carta," *Previsión* 15 February 1910.

democracy. Brioso constantly drew from the patriotic rhetoric of Maceo and the work of Estenoz to critique contradictions within Cuba's democratic system. Activists such as Estenoz, she claimed, worked not solely on behalf of the Afro-Cuban population, but for the development of a just republic. Brioso's decision to emphasize the patriotic nature of the PIC made its members appear as allies of the State, rather than its adversaries—this was most apparent in black support of the current president, one of many elected officials who "owed the black his high position." [174] Disregarding attacks on the work of Estenoz, she maintained that the movement's triumph would make up for his hardships.[175]

Brioso sought to legitimize the PIC as a political party by aligning herself with the racial rhetoric of the State. She asserted that Estenoz's protests against racial discrimination and government corruption exemplified the definitive act of patriotism carried out by a man of color. One of her many articles published in *Previsión* relayed the humiliation inflicted upon blacks throughout Cuba's history. Many had been deterred when silenced within politics, denied from obtaining professional positions, or jeered at for their assumed cultural inferiority. She insisted that one must not feel dejected, as such sentiments undermined the work of *Previsión*. More importantly, she claimed, conceding when faced with discrimination strengthened the work of the opposition and further reinforced blacks' ability to be disregarded as citizens. Brioso promoted the unification of the community of color in order to strengthen their movement for equality. She accentuated the *independientes*' goal of obtaining equality, explaining that "all [men] are

174 "Una carta."
175 "Una carta."

equal and the only thing that should distinguish them is one's talent and virtue."[176] Brioso thus affirmed the nationalist rhetoric of racelessness as she affirmed Estenoz's protests on behalf of blacks who confronted racism in employment, as well as the political system.

The Cuban government's ban on race-based political parties infuriated the members of the PIC who felt that their rights had been denied. In 1912, Estenoz helped organize a public protest in the eastern part of the island. Unfortunately, what began as a peaceful demonstration quickly turned into a massacre. Over the course of several months, the Cuban army massacred thousands of Afro-Cubans, in addition to the PIC's leaders and some of its members.[177] Hundreds more were arrested and placed on trial for their association with known members or due to rumors of having supported what became known as the racist rebellion.

Women of color also experienced persecution from the police and military officials alongside their male *compañeros*. Afro-Cuban women were among those killed in the protests and the subsequent battles that followed.[178] As government officials suspected Cubans of color to have collaborated with the PIC rebels, women also became subject to harassment by officials who believed that they served as spies. In her memoir *Reyita*, Daisy Rubiera Castillo de los Reyes recalled the arrest of her aunt Dona Mangá following the May protest. Police accused Doña Mangá of having stood in the middle of

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[176] "Iran los negros a Palacio," *Previsión* 20 February 1910.
[177] Helg documents the PIC's rise to political prominence in "Afro-Cuban Protest: The Partido Independiente de Color, 1908-1912" *Cuban Studies* 21 (1991): 101-121. Also see Helg, *Our Rightful Share*.
[178] Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 211.

a fire, "putting on perfume and shouting 'Down with the Morúa law!'" [179] Mangá received six months in prison. Though she did not confirm that Mangá participated in the actual protest, Castillo de los Reyes believed that Mangá experienced harassment due to her leadership role in one of the PIC women's committees.[180]

Shifting social dynamics in the aftermath of the 1912 Massacre greatly altered patriarchal discourses of racial progress among Cubans of color. Historian Aline Helg argues that the event "unmasked" deep-seated racism among white elites and popular classes.[181] Within local communities, white elites attempted to enforce racial segregation within public spaces, including parks, hotels, and restaurants.[182] Anti-black sentiments led many to declare that Cubans of color should go "back to Africa" or at least "out of Cuba."[183] In addition, rumors of black conspiracies spread throughout the island. de la Fuente connects these conspiracies to electoral periods. He contends that such rumors "sought to minimize the benefits that blacks might get from their participation in politics and to keep the momentum for racial repression alive."[184] In many ways they succeeded. Afro-Cuban representation fell in Congress, thus greatly affecting the terms on which they could assert their merit to citizenship, as well as their political power.

Though a political party, the PIC articulated patriarchal discourses of racial progress in a manner similar to elite and aspiring-class societies. Party members maintained a

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[179] Reyes Castillo Bueno, *Reyita*, 84.
[180] Reyes Castillo Bueno, *Reyita*, 84.
[181] Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 228.
[182] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 78-81; Guridy, "Racial Knowledge in Cuba," 106-168.
[183] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 78.
[184] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 81.

predominantly male leadership, allowing women to participate through separate women's committees. In addition, the PIC promoted leisure, cultural refinement, and intellectual development through its periodical, *Previsión*. Yet, as a political party, the PIC provided a rare opportunity for women to engage in national politics as individuals dedicated to racial improvement, and many did so by publishing articles that emphasized patriotism and uplifted black manhood.

MINERVA AND THE EMERGENCE OF AFRO-CUBAN FEMINISM

As women's roles within the public sphere expanded to include more writers, working professionals, and community leaders, Afro-Cuban feminists asserted the importance of reforming the home and women serving as spearheads of the moral and intellectual development of the youth. Although feminism had not yet become an organized political and ideological movement in Cuba during the 1910s and few "feminist" organizations existed before the 1920s, emerging individual elite and middle-class feminists publicly critiqued women's social subordination in magazines and newspapers. However, they had yet to establish a strong visible presence within society. This resulted, in part, from a lack of cohesion among feminist groups. The first "feminist" newspaper did not emerge until 1918, and the First National Women's Congress did not take place until 1923.[185] *Minerva*, however, published a regular feminist column from 1910 through 1915, challenging the chronology of the feminist movement. During this decade, feminism

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185 See Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*; and Julio Cesar González Pagés, *En busco de un espacio: historia de mujeres en Cuba* (La Habana: Ediciones de Ciencias Sociales, 2003).

would thus become a political philosophy that linked the private and public spheres, elevating female education and instruction as fundamental to motherhood, patriotism, and racial progress.

One women's group became particularly vocal in articulating a feminist perspective on racial advancement: the feminist writers of *Minerva*. Edited by the political leaders Oscar G. Edreira and Idelfonso Morúa Contreras (the son of Senator Martin Morúa Delgado), *Minerva* was one of a few magazines produced out of Havana by aspiring-class Cubans of color when it surfaced in 1910. The bi-weekly magazine featured political and social articles of interest to the Afro-Cuban community on the island and throughout the Caribbean, in addition to New York and Florida. Furthermore, *Minerva* was the only magazine known to publish Afro-Cuban feminist perspectives through the regular inclusion of its column, "Páginas Feministas" ("Feminist Pages"). Feminist editors such as Gloria Alonso, Mercedes Zayas, Nieve Prieto, and Tecla Castillo de Escoto committed themselves to uplifting the community of color by addressing its women. One of *Minerva*'s readers, Georgina Herrera regarded the column as a model of progress, a publication that, "with the gracefulness of its hand warms us, supplying us with the route to social solidarity."[186] Feminist writer Susana Alonso y Oro concurred with Herrera in a letter in which she posited that the feminist pages represented women's emancipation. Alonso explained, "If for [our liberation] we do not spill blood as in the battlefields, it should at least cost us moans and sighs released from our chest."[187] Alonso y Oro's letter implied that, similar to the movement for Cuban independence, women's

[186] "A Minerva," *Minerva* 1 December 1910.
[187] "El hombre y la civilización," *Minerva* 10 October 1910.

emancipation required a vicious battle between feminists and those who sought to limit female intellectual and cultural development. Both Herrera and Alonso y Oro believed that a feminist column would unify women in the struggle for progress on behalf of their communities.

During its second phase of publication in 1910, the column "Páginas Feministas" became the platform through which Afro-Cuban women addressed social issues. Though no longer a magazine dedicated to women alone, the new format continued to feature more women writers than any other Afro-Cuban periodical.[188] However, it appears that the feminist pages established a gendered boundary within the magazine. Women primarily published essays within the feminist pages; men rarely printed articles within the column. This is not to suggest that the feminist pages served as a space solely for addressing "women's issues." The section's contributors dealt with subjects relevant to all sectors of society, including education and social instruction. Thus the feminist pages discussed matters that Afro-Cuban women deemed to be feminist concerns.

Between 1910 and 1915, numerous women from prominent families of color utilized feminist discourses of progress in order to assert women's significance to the advancement of their homes, communities, and nation. Angelina Edreira joined *Minerva* through her familial ties to the editor Oscar Edreira. Vestalina and Arabella Morúa Delgado, two column editors and music teachers, were the daughters of Martin Morúa Delgado and sisters of the co-editor Idelfonso Morúa Contreras. Feminist writer Prisca

[188] K. Lynn Stoner and Mario González, *Minerva: Revista Quincenal Dedicada a la Mujer de Color* (La Habana: Instituto de Historia de Cuba Microfiche, 1998).

Acosta de Gualba also worked alongside her husband, Miguel Gualba.[189] While *Minerva*'s feminist writers and contemporary white feminists had commonalities, Afro-Cuban women fused feminism with racial uplift to formulate an agenda for female, community, and national advancement. As such, they pursued expanded rights to education and collective empowerment as members of the *raza de color* (colored race). Publishing feminist poetry and articles on community and national development helped exhibit the moral and intellectual capabilities of blacks and mulattoes before the world.[190] Feminist writer Consuelo David Calvet declared, "*Minerva* is proud of its people; prestige of the unfortunate Ethiopian race: symbol of progress and civilization."[191] David's connection of Cubans of color to Ethiopia highlights how many Afro-Cuban women, like their male counterparts, linked themselves to a global black diasporic community defined by a shared history of racial oppression.

A year after the establishment of *Minerva*'s feminist column, editor de Gualba founded the Feminist Club "Minerva" through which she hoped to sustain and develop Afro-Cuban feminist politics. She and her co-organizers sought to create an association committed to "the progress of the arts, literature and sports" that would rise to the level of the feminist groups that existed in cities such as London, New York, Paris, Berlin, and San Francisco.[192] Focusing on the model of cultural development established by European women, de Gualba and her peers drew inspiration from international feminist organizations, such as the Lyceum of Paris, as they promoted the advancement of the

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[189] Maria del Carmen Barcia, *Capas Populares*, 139.
[190] "Mí opinion," *Minerva* 1 November 1910.
[191] "¡Adelante Minerva!" *Minerva* Febrero 1911.
[192] "Club Feminista 'Minerva,'" *Minerva* 15 January 1911.

Afro-Cuban population. De Gualba and her peers were also likely aware of the criticism experienced by the feminist clubs of other nations; therefore they emphasized their alignment with the mission of *Minerva*. They wanted to assure *Minerva*'s readers that the Feminist Club "Minerva" posed no threat to the patriarchal social order of the aspiring-class community of color.

Collectively, *Minerva*'s feminists emphasized education, motherhood, patriotism, and the arts within the patriarchal framework of gender roles and racial uplift promoted by their male family members. For instance, Tecla Castillo de Escoto argued that from women derived the "future of the fatherland."[193] Specifically, she believed, women bore the responsibility for the nascent generation of men and women who would one day lead the community of color toward progress. Castillo believed that the Christian-educated woman possessed the doctrine through which to form the hearts of young men who might one day become a soldier, politician, magistrate, or governor who would either place themselves in favor of or against the interests of the people.[194] Castillo's religious vision of women's roles assertively linked women to Cuba's progress as a strong, democratic state.

Acknowledging women's integral role to state formation, feminist writer Carmelina Serracent charged women with rearing the next generation of citizens to be equipped with the knowledge and desire to further Cuba's political advancement. She explained, "One cannot doubt that the nascent generation is in the hands of women. She holds the future of the patriot, and disposes the interests of the family, society, and

[193] "La Influencia de la mujer en el porvenir de la sociedad," *Minerva* 1 November 1910.
[194] "La Influencia de la mujer en el porvenir de la sociedad"

state."[195] Similar to Castillo, Serracent suggested that women controlled the destiny of society as educators and caretakers. Women bore the responsibility of teaching girls in general, and boys in particular, their political rights and social duties. Serracent emphasized that children's education should occur implicitly through example, as well as explicitly through instruction. Her decision to label men as breadwinners and women as caretakers of the home demonstrates that patriarchy was central to the discourse of Afro-Cuban feminism. Indeed, *Minerva*'s feminist writers routinely linked women's familial roles to ideas of social motherhood, which was defined as a woman's duty to uplift the nation by raising productive citizens. While men's roles as patriots included politics and managing society through the family, women's contributions to the community and nation—not only the family—depended upon their success as mothers. Serracent thus reminded women that their boys would someday become men: "Man is no more than what woman makes him."[196]

In many ways, Afro-Cuban feminism reflected a burgeoning national discourse on modernity and national progress shaped by various artists, intellectuals, and social scientists.[197] As noted by Stoner and historian Mario González, "women writing in the colonial and early republican periods held education above all other achievements as the means for moving their race from the obscurity of slavery into the participatory culture of

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[195] "La Influencia de la mujer en el porvenir de la sociedad."
[196] "La Influencia de la mujer en el porvenir de la Sociedad."
[197] Bronfman, *Measures of Equality*; de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*; Robin Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness: Afro-Cubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997).

a sovereign, modern state." [198] In the midst of the struggle for equality and expanded gender rights, Afro-Cuban women envisioned themselves as civic leaders essential to the success of Cuban politics and society. Furthermore, the writers distanced themselves from African-derived cultural practices in order to align themselves with the dominant white ideals of nation, progress, and citizenship—not a single article called for the retention of African cultural practices.[199] Serracent's regular feature, "Mundo Religioso" ("Religious World"), serves as one example in which she promoted Catholic religious beliefs and practices as a vehicle for obtaining cultural advancement.

Afro-Cuban feminists also asserted that individual and collective improvement extended beyond women's roles as mothers and caretakers, focusing on women's academic and cultural development through formal education. For example, writer Eugenia Zayas y Estévez contended that female education was the key to ensuring the prosperity of the home and, thus, the community. She, herself, was a product of "proper" female education. By "bringing the light of truth" to her home, education had allowed her to "progress" as a woman of her community and become "a good friend, loving wife, and an exemplar of my race and my country."[200] Zayas understood that instruction presented more than an opportunity for individual mobility; it also served to "uplift" the community of color by introducing "moral qualities" and civic discipline. Thus, she argued that education formed the base of all civilized nations. Without it, "the world would become

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[198] Stoner and González, *Minerva*, 3.
[199] Stoner and González, *Minerva*, 5.
[200] Eugenia Zayas y Estévez, "La escuela," 31 January 1911.

the most exposed hell."[201] Zayas emphasized both intellectual and social instruction to reform the Afro-Cuban community. Intellectual development, she believed, created professionals and distinguished members of the community, while social training dictated moral behavior among men and women. Together, both types of teaching would reform the Afro-Cuban community and facilitate the enlightenment principles of culture and civilization.

Marriage and Divorce

During the early 1910s, as male political leaders initiated property, marriage, and divorce reform—a means of gaining national progress through the implementation of modern social trends—white feminists utilized debates on gender roles to push for expanded rights within the home and public sphere. Proposed matrimony reforms aimed to eliminate the double standard between men and women. They outlined the husband's responsibility for maintaining the home as the breadwinner and protector. It enabled wives to hold their husbands accountable for not only infidelity, but also abuse and neglect. Both men *and* women received the option of filing for divorce, and women gained economic benefits through the right to alimony and control over their property. Liberals supported these reforming, arguing that in order to become a modern nation, the state needed to exert full control over public behavior. Conservatives, however, believed that the institutionalization of new divorce laws would corrupt family values and lead to a

[201] "La escuela."

drastic increase in promiscuity, child illegitimacy, and immoral conduct.[202] Liberals rebutted that children who witnessed adultery and separation suffered more than children of parents in healthy relationships who had divorced and remarried. These issues became the focal point for Cuban feminists to insert themselves into the male-dominated world of politics. Stoner explains that "[D]ivorce became a feminist issue when feminists realized that it freed women from the confines of a debilitating relationship and joyless burdens of family responsibility in a hostile environment."[203] When the divorce law was finally passed in 1918, it did indeed shift gender relations by granting women new legal powers as individuals able to act on their own behalf.[204]

In the years leading up to the passing of the act, marriage reform debates provided more than an opportunity to authorize new political agents. By providing women with legal authority, these reforms potentially empowered women to challenge the nature of patriarchal household rule by demanding access to education and political representation on behalf of Cuban advancement. However, this was not their intended effect. Elite males who supported divorce and adultery legislation aimed solely to dismantle social customs and the political power of the Conservatives and Catholic Church who maintained their authority established during the colonial era.[205] White feminist activists such as Mariblanca Sabas Alomá, Ofelia Rodríguez Acosta, and María Collado utilized debates over matrimony to challenge women's sexual exploitation and domestic violence.

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[202] Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*, 70.
[203] Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*, 72.
[204] Graciela Cruz-Taura, "Women's Rights and the Cuban Constitution of 1940," *Cuban Studies* 24 (1994): 123-140.
[205] K. Lynn Stoner, "On Men Reforming the Rights of Men: The Abrogation of the Cuban Adultery Law, 1930," *Cuban Studies* 21 (1991): 83-99. Also see Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*.

Though congressmen and white feminist activists sought to revise gender roles, these reforms seemed to underscore the perceptions of Afro-Cuban inferiority, creating a paradox for *Minerva*'s male and female writers who were committed to racial uplift. On one hand, embracing the right to divorce might portray elite Afro-Cubans as individuals devoted to modernizing Cuba through legal reforms. On the other hand, the magazine's contributors could appear to be furthering the image of black moral inferiority by backing divorce reforms. Indeed, divorce challenged the model of the "moral and legal" family that had become crucial to controlling public comportment. As demonstrated by historian Alejandro de la Fuente, whites presupposed the lack of nuclear families within the Afro-Cuban community as "as an inherent trait of blackness" that reflected their "congenital inferiority."[206] To challenge negative conceptions of Afro-Cuban health and morality, aspiring-class blacks and mulattos presented marriage as a strategy for regenerating the community of color. Marriage was largely unavailable to non-white elites during the colonial era, leaving the majority of Cubans as illegitimate and therefore "unrespectable" in the eyes of society.[207] Black and mulatto elites of the early twentieth century sought to establish themselves as respectable citizens and families through matrimony. Thus, even as marriage reforms made divorce more accessible, statistics suggest that Afro-Cubans did not avail themselves of this opportunity as much as might be expected. In fact, they embraced marriage and protecting the nuclear family: the national rate of marriage among non-whites doubled between 1899 and 1943.[208] This suggests that most Cubans

[206] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 155.
[207] Logan, "Holy Sacraments and Illicit Encounters," 2.
[208] Logan, "Holy Sacraments and Illicit Encounters," 7.

focused more upon increasing the social standing of their communities than taking advantage of new political opportunities presented to women.

Placed within the context of increasing racial tensions and the emergence of the marriage debates, how did *Minerva*'s contributors view divorce? Multiple factors influenced aspiring-class Afro-Cuban perceptions of divorce. *Minerva*'s writers and editors routinely endorsed the legal and moral family, encouraging Cubans of color to marry and maintain the traditional structure of the patriarchal household. Out of the hundreds of articles published in *Minerva* between 1910 and 1915, only two directly addressed divorce. The first, printed in March of 1911, appeared within the feminist pages. Titled "El Divorcio," Serracent identified divorce as a complex moral and sociological issue. She explained, "In my opinion, one should not approve the divorce law, at least for now. Given our intellectual and economic conditions, character, and customs, its establishment would engender disastrous results."[209] For Serracent, Cuban women lacked the "intellectual preparation" necessary to enjoy "liberties" such as divorce. As such, she cautioned against the implementation of new divorce laws that would undermine the regeneration of the community of color.

Serracent's article affirmed the belief that married families uplifted the Afro-Cuban population by serving as role models to future generations and protecting the "virtue of the community."[210] To develop her argument against divorce, she compared Cuban women's social progress to the development of women in the United States.

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[209] "El Divorcio," *Minerva*, March 30, 1911, 7.
[210] "El Divorcio."

Serracent determined that the Cuban character was excessively passionate and lustful, leaving women without rational control over their behavior. She claimed that Cuba stood in stark contrast to the social conditions available to women of the United States. In the case of divorce, American women had enough education to survive without a husband. In contrast, Cuban women had less formal training and thus often found themselves in a lower economic status as divorcees. Serracent suggested that such an economic position reduced women to domestic work. In extreme circumstances, a woman had to "sell her degradation," producing the type of corruption that "stain[ed] families" and bore "bad fruits."[211] Thus, Serracent linked divorce to the danger of descending into "lower" lifestyles as domestic workers or prostitutes, and she equated poverty with dishonor and illegitimate children.[212] Her position on divorce in Cuba illuminated the anxieties surrounding race, class, and sexuality within the community of color during the 1910s. For elite Afro-Cubans such as Serracent, matrimony ensured sexual morality and provided economic stability under a patriarchal guardian.

Three years later, a second article published in *Minerva* revealed a different perspective regarding womanhood and community progress. In "Divorciémonos!" ("Let's Divorce!") an anonymous writer presented divorce not as a threat to happy marriages, but as a shield for women in violent relationships. Married women lacked legal protection against spousal abuse—which in some cases was so severe that it led to husbands murdering their wives. Considering women's limited rights as wives, the author presented marriage as a tyrannical space in which men dominated women with free reign.

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[211] "El Divorcio."
[212] "El Divorcio."

The author saw the divorce laws as a rectification of domestic issues that undermined social development and suggested that divorce helped dignify the Cuban woman by "remedying her from matrimonial tyranny."[213]

Above all, the author sought to empower married women as full citizens within a society committed to national development. The author pondered, "Where are the legally free and housed individuals, if only from the point of human view?"[214] Both social and political leaders had failed to support a woman's right to choose her husband or contribute to making major household decisions. Thus, the divorce laws represented an opportunity to provide women with new legal rights. Divorce challenged the abusive nature of patriarchal power and, at least in theory, presented women with the opportunity to protect themselves and their children. Emphasizing the protection of women as a key motive for supporting the divorce law, the author referenced the current legal circumstances that allowed men to murder their wives who committed adultery in order to maintain their honor.[215] The author also challenged social norms that presented divorced women and their children as degenerates. By presenting the shifting of gender roles as intrinsic to the evolution of Cuban society, the author concluded that divorce should be more easily accessible for women living in extremely violent households.[216]

The divergent perspectives on divorce presented by Serracent and the anonymous writer demonstrate that Afro-Cuban feminists held a range of views regarding family laws and the respectability of the community of color, and they represented distinct

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[213] "Divorciémonos!" *Minerva* 15 April 1914.
[214] "Divorciémonos!"
[215] "Divorciémonos!"
[216] "Divorciémonos!"

visions of how divorce would affect women's roles in ensuring Cuban progress. During the three-year period between the publishing of "El Divorcio" and "Divorciémonos!" several *Minerva* articles reflected that Afro-Cuban intellectuals engaged in discussions of women's legal rights during the 1910s—even if the articles weren't explicitly about divorce. For example, in 1913, Jasón Miseret declared his support of radical feminism for women of color. More than an opportunity to educate women, Miseret viewed feminism as a movement that would result in the full social emancipation of women. Contemporary social politics, he argued, permitted the savage treatment of women as property owned by their fathers, brothers, and husbands. In addition to lacking the right to protect themselves and their children, Miseret claimed that society utilized legal policies and social customs to deny women their "natural rights" as citizens. Society's relegation of women to the domestic sphere as caretakers perpetuated their marginalization, and the codification of marriage customs naturalized sexual inequalities. As a result, women suffered not only physically, but also *intellectually* by being condemned to the home. He explained that social philosophy led to the development of modern morals, but that, over time, feminism would lead to the eradication of racial and national prejudices by undermining "religious and centrist impulses."[217] Thus, Miseret attacked the construction of gender roles and linked the "liberation" of women to the process of modernizing Cuba. Miseret's article was among the most radical perspectives regarding women's roles in the Afro-Cuban agenda for racial uplift. However, it suggests that ideological variations of feminism guided changing perspectives of divorce and community uplift.

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[217] "La Razón de femenismo." *Minerva* 1 October 1913. Also see Victor Hugo's "El Derecho de la Mujer" *Minerva* 15 January 1914.

Collectively, *Minerva*'s feminist column demonstrates the intersections of race, class, and sexuality within a community of color committed to the advancement of its members and families. It also provides rich material for understanding how Afro-Cuban women situated themselves within the shifting social dynamics of the second decade of the twentieth century. Similar to white elites, women of color possessed strong views on issues such as social leadership, education, and women's rights as citizens. However, Afro-Cuban women's social agenda differed greatly. Discourses of black inferiority and social deviance placed them and their families outside the boundaries of full citizenship and denied their humanity. Thus, utilizing the gendered language of progress and the ideology of racial uplift became important to their conceptualization of feminism. As such, their writings prioritized creating a conservative image of a moral Afro-Cuban community over demanding equal political rights.

PATRIARCHY AND POLITICAL VOICE THROUGH LETTER WRITING

In addition to founding and writing for Afro-Cuban publications, many women of color articulated patriarchal discourses of racial progress through letter writing. This section focuses on how black and mulatto women appealed to the Afro-Cuban intellectual and politician Juan Gualberto Gómez in order to improve the lot of their families and communities. I analyze the ways in which understandings of race, gender, and patriarchy were articulated in relation to political networks and familial associations. In addition, I examine the social and material concerns affecting Afro-Cuban women, including

employment and labor opportunities, protection from racial discrimination, and pensions for military service.

Two considerations frame my approach. To begin with, I draw from the voluminous correspondence contained within the *Fondo Adquisiciones* at the Archivo Nacional de Cuba (National Cuban Archive, ANC). The *Fondo* houses thousands of letters sent to major political leaders, including an array of personal correspondence, invitations, tributes, and requests sent to Gómez between 1881 and 1931. After identifying hundreds of letters written by women, I focus on those written by women of color. These letters—the majority of which were written in pencil—include poignant details related to individual identities, contain compelling narratives, and shed light on daily life during the early decades of the republic. These documents help to recreate the experiences and perspectives of Afro-Cuban women in their pursuit for mobility, resources, and legal rights.

The second consideration that informs my analysis is how women of color saw and appealed to Gómez as an exemplar of racial progress and arbiter of state power. His rise from poverty to national distinction demonstrated that Afro-Cubans could in fact succeed through education and hard work. Moreover, his relationship to the community of color reflected the two-sided nature of Cuba's meritocracy. On one hand, meritocracy and education provided a "route" for social mobility.[218] On the other hand, Cuba's system of meritocracy excluded Afro-Cubans and poor whites from administrative or white-collar employment because most did not have the necessary social connections to obtain

[218] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 138.

these positions. Afro-Cuban women wrote Gómez with the hopes of overcoming this obstacle, and they emphasized their families and patriarchal gender roles in their pursuit for income and access to educational and professional opportunities.

In many ways, Gómez's life history provided a model for Cubans of color who aspired towards individual and collective improvement. The son of slaves who resided in Matanzas, he became a close colleague of the revolutionary leader José Martí during the independence movement. During the 1890s, Gómez rose to prominence as a leader in the struggle for Afro-Cuban rights when he founded the Directorio Central de las Sociedades de la Raza de Color (Central Directorate of the Societies of the Colored Race) and edited newspapers that included *La Igualdad*.[219] He and his Afro-Cuban contemporary Martín Morúa Delgado became the first nonwhite members of the Real Sociedad Económica de los Amigos del País (Royal Economic Society of the Friends of the Colony) during the same decade. They gained recognition as key intellectual figures of the era through their publications and association with the organization. However, Gómez's anti-colonial sentiments eventually placed him at odds with the established order. In 1895, he led an uprising against Spanish forces in Matanzas. Although movement failed, Gómez's leadership contributed to Afro-Cuban support—which compromised 50 percent of the region's insurgents—during subsequent uprisings.[220] Two years later, he was imprisoned for his anti-colonial efforts in North Africa.[221] By the time he returned to Cuba at the end

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[219] For a description of the movement, see Rebecca J. Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1860-1899* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985): 255-278.
[220] Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 58.
[221] Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 82.

of the nineteenth century, he had become a well-known patriot who fought on behalf of Afro-Cuban intellectual and political development, as well as national sovereignty.[222]

Gómez promoted an agenda for national progress that encompassed cross-racial fraternity, nationalism, and anti-imperialism during the U.S. intervention (1898–1902) and early years of the republic.[223] Interestingly, he later adopted an agenda for racial progress that, in many ways, differed from his earlier work to uplift the community of color. He served as a delegate at the 1901 Constitutional Assembly, but he did not promote any causes that may have been specific to the experiences of blacks and mulattos. Historian Aline Helg notes that "Juan Gualberto Gómez entered mainstream politics after his brief 1899 endeavor to organize the *oriental* veterans was met with the usual accusation that he was attempting to make Cuba into another Haiti."[224] Such allegations were more of a reflection of contemporary anxieties regarding black political organizing than they were of Gómez's intentions—he promoted black integration throughout his political career. Gómez helped to establish a series of organizations that unified whites and Afro-Cubans. He co-founded the Partido Independiente (Independent Party), later renamed the Partido Republicano Independiente (Independent Republican Party), and joined the Partido Liberal (Liberal Party) in 1905. He was elected to congress

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[222] On the life of Gómez, see Juan Alberto Gómez, *Por Cuba libre: Homenaje de la Ciudad de la Habana al gran cubano en el centenario de su nacimiento* (Habana: Oficina del Historiador de la Ciudad, 1954); Jesús Sabourín Fornaris, *Juan Gualberto Gómez*: símbolo del deber (Santiago de Cuba: Universidad de Oriente, 1954); Rafael Marquina, *Juan Gualberto Gómez en sí* (Habana: Instituto Nacional de Cultura, 1956); Angelina Edreira de Caballero, *Vida y obra de Juan Gualberto Gómez: seis lecciones en su centenario, cursillo de divulgación*, 2nd Edition (Habana: Imprenta por R. Méndez, 1973).
[223] Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 121.
[224] Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 121.

for numerous terms throughout the 1910s and 20s.[225] Gómez therefore affirmed nationalist discourses—discourses that frowned upon Afro-Cuban political organizing—in order to promote cross-racial unity and black integration into public life.

Rather than address racial discrimination through race-based political organizing, he promoted a model of racial progress in which Cubans of color focused on education and cultural development. For Gómez, education was the key to attaining jobs necessary for social mobility. He encouraged instruction through his articles, speeches, and work for the Havana Board of Education (1899). He also remained a well-known figure within Afro-Cuban societies, attending society functions, serving as the *padrino* (godfather) of younger members, and publishing articles within the Afro-Cuban press. His connection to the community of color allowed him to create patronage networks that provided Afro-Cubans with access to employment and schools.[226]

Afro-Cuban women who wrote to Gómez were most likely aware of his political activities, as well as his perspectives on racial uplift through education for both women and men. Letters sent to Gómez from elite and aspiring-class Afro-Cuban women demonstrate their awareness of his social and political mission during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century periods. Some likely read his published works or met him in person, while others may have simply heard about his work. The women who wrote to Gómez addressed him as an agent of the state and an advocate for the community of color. Numerous letters recognized his commitment to the "colored race," or the writers

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[225] Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 121. Also see de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*.
[226] Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 122.

identified themselves as members of *la raza* (the race).[227] Some women wrote Gómez to offer condolences to his family following the death of his wife, to send words of kindness to their beloved *padrino*, or to foster a relationship that might benefit them in the future. Other women sought his help in releasing family members from prison and requested his support in their pursuit of educational and professional opportunities. It is important to note that an Afro-Cuban woman's decision to write Gómez reflected her awareness of his political connections and social networks.

Afro-Cuban women's letters to Gómez must be situated within the context of the evolving education and labor dynamics of the period. Cubans of color recognized that education was the key to attaining advancement within the labor and the political sphere, and they understood that the odds were stacked against them. The majority of Cubans of color lived in poverty, unable to obtain most positions in the industrial and professional sectors. Census data highlights that, while 51 percent of all whites were literate at the turn-of-the-century, only 28 percent of Cubans of color could read or write. This profoundly affected male suffrage, as only 24 percent of Afro-Cuban males met the literacy requirements in comparison to 58.5 percent of white males. Seventy percent of Afro-Cuban women were illiterate, in comparison to 52 percent of white women. Inequalities in literacy and education continued throughout the early decades of the republic. By 1919, 51 percent of Afro-Cubans over the age of ten were literate, while 63 of their white counterparts were able to read. Helg notes that "Only in Santiago, where

[227] Many Afro-Cuban women employed the terms, *la raza*, *la raza negra* (the black race), or *la raza de color* (the colored race) in their letters.

opportunities for people had been historically greater, did a majority of Afro-Cuban women know how to read and write."[228]

Afro-Cuban women also experienced limited opportunities within the labor sector. While most white women were "without gainful employment," those who did work were predominately professionals, often as teachers.[229] According to the 1907 census, 65 percent of the 73,520 females over 14 years of age and with gainful employment were Afro-Cuban.[230] Thus, while 6 percent of white women worked outside of the home, 20 percent of women of color depended upon their own labor to support themselves and their families.[231] White women were more likely to come from homes in which a father or husband served as the sole financial provider. Racial divides in female employment increased by 1919, when nearly three-quarters of all female wage earners were women of color.[232] Yet, while they comprised the majority of female workers, race limited their opportunities in the workforce. Afro-Cuban women worked primarily within agriculture or as domestic workers in the urban sphere, and they compromised a mere two percent of laborers in the "trade and transportation" sector. Restricted educational and employment opportunities restricted the economic mobility of Afro-Cuban families.[233]

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[228] Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 157.
[229] Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 157.
[230] Cuba. *Censo de la Republica de Cuba bajo la administracion provisional de los Estados Unidos, 1907* (Washington, D.C.: Oficina del censo de los Estados Unidos, 1908).
[231] Cuba, *Censo, 1907*.
[232] Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*.
[233] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 117.

Institutional reforms undermined black and mulatto women's opportunities for mobility and intensified their struggles for survival within a modernizing economy, including those that encouraged Spanish immigration. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, state officials encouraged Spanish immigration as a strategy to "whiten" the population. The immigration law of 1906 allocated one million dollars to Spanish "colonization" programs, and it reserved 80 percent of the funds to relocate European and Canary Island families to Cuba.[234] Government policies resulted in limited success of Spanish immigration. Between 1902 and 1907, an estimated 128,000 Spaniards immigrated to Cuba; almost 800,000 entered Cuba between 1902 and 1931. Yet, only 70,000 settled permanently.[235] Significantly, the sheer number of Spaniards working in Cuba influenced shifts in the racial composition of several labor sectors. Historian Alejandro de la Fuente links the drop in overall Afro-Cuban female employment between 1899 and 1907 to their displacement by younger Spanish women immigrants. During this period, Spanish women workers increased from 21 percent to 32 percent of the labor force.[236] Employers preferred white Cuban and Spanish women labor within the developing areas of nursing, secretarial work, and retail.[237] Additionally, de la Fuente explains that as Spanish women became preferred as domestic workers, black women in urban centers were pushed toward factory work. Many turned to the informal sector as street vendors and prostitutes. Therefore, the displacement of black and mulatto

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[234] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 46.
[235] Aviva Chomsky, "Barbados or Canada?" Race, Immigration and Nation in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba. HAHR 80.3 (2000): 415-462; de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 101.
[236] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 122.
[237] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 102.

women within commercial and domestic sectors exacerbated their marginalization in employment.

Yet, even as women confronted racism and sexism in their daily lives, significant strides occurred. Cuba's literacy rate in general and the community of color in particular increased steadily throughout the early republican period. Whereas only 30 percent of Afro-Cubans were literate in 1899, 66.9 percent of the population was literate by 1907. Literacy among Cubans of color had almost doubled by 1931, nearly eliminating the racial literacy gap. The number of women of color professionals also increased. Between 1899 and 1924 the number of teachers of color grew from 3.4 percent to 15.8 percent in public education.[238] As the number of professional women increased, so did Afro-Cuban influence within the public sphere. Cubans of color held more positions as congressmen, local elected officials, and newspaper writers and editors. Moreover, politicians throughout the island who sought votes for upcoming elections appealed to Afro-Cuban societies, such as Club Atenas of Havana.[239]

Writing for Work and Educational Opportunities

Gómez's call for education resonated with women of color from various social positions: rural and urban, educated and uneducated, wealthy and poor. One's level of education served as a major "cause and effect" of Afro-Cuban women's marginalization within the employment sector, and, as noted, education provided one route for improving one's

[238] de la Fuente notes that the number of Afro-Cuban teachers remained below five percent through the 1920s. See, *A Nation for All*, 144.
[239] de la Fuente, 138-171.

social and economic status.[240] Yet obtaining access to schools stood as a major obstacle for many families. Many schools required tuition fees that the majority of Cubans were unable to afford. Acceptance to primary and secondary programs required social connections that most families of color did not possess, and entrance exams to high-school level and university programs required fees and a working knowledge of reading, writing, and math that further limited women of color and their children from obtaining an advanced education. Many Cubans of color complained of racism in private religious schools.[241] de la Fuente states, "In contrast to public schools, private institutions were virtually segregated. […] Afro-Cuban teachers seldom found employment in these institutions, another important contrast with the public schools, in which their share of total teaching jobs increased gradually through the 1920s. Afro-Cuban teachers' underrepresentation in private schools was closely related to their elitist character, most of these schools were religious and foreign-controlled."[242] Recognizing this reality, many families tapped into local and political networks to gain access to various institutions in Cuba and abroad.

For instance, in August of 1915, Ana María Alvarez Martínez wrote to Gómez asking for assistance in furthering her education. A 21-year-old orphan who had struggled to support herself and her 19-year-old brother for eleven years, she lived in the town of Florida where the rent was cheap. She supported the local societies of Santa Clara, La Bella Unión, and El Gran Maceo (she noted that she preferred La Bella Unión).

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[240] Pérez explains that "Educational patterns were at once cause and effect of the low-status occupational status of women." See, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 158.
[241] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 138.
[242] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 141.

In 1914, after a chance encounter with a local Afro-Cuban society member Eulojio Montenegro told her of the universities for African Americans in the United States, Alvarez eventually learned to write so that she might contact Booker T. Washington and enroll in one of his universities. She wrote to Gómez, "I have not been able to facilitate the trip [to the U.S.] due to a lack of resources."[243] Therefore, she sought his help in furthering her education, as she explained, "for the wellbeing myself and my class" because she "greatly desired to progress."[244]

Alvarez was not alone is her desire to study at one of Washington's African-American universities. In his study of Afro-Cuban/African-American relationships, historian Frank Guridy states that hundreds of African-descended students from Africa, the Caribbean, and South and Central American attended Washington's Tuskegee Institute in Alabama well into the 1920s. Afro-Cuban and Afro-Puerto Rican students were among the first to enroll in the school. Gómez helped to facilitate this process by assisting in the recruitment of young Cubans and by sending his son Juan Eusebio with one of the first groups of students. Those who attended Tuskegee participated in Washington's racial uplift agenda. They received an education that emphasized industrial training, and many returned to Cuba to become well-known professionals. While enrolled, students had to adhere to codes of respectability that resembled those of elite and aspiring-class Cuban clubs, and each individual was required to wear a uniform and

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[243] Fondo Adquisiciones, ANC.

[244] Fondo Adquisiciones Legajo 10, Expediente 292, ANC. For an examination of Afro-Cubans who attended historically Tuskegee and other black schools in the United States see Frank Guridy's *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

refrain from wearing bright colors.[245] Afro-Cuban students who opted to attend Tuskegee did so because they recognized the limited opportunities available to them in Cuba and understood the benefits of an education in advancing themselves and their nation. Guridy explains that "Even when they felt an intense investment in the Cuban nation, their uncertain material circumstances and the absence of local educational options compelled them to look elsewhere, particularly since the Cuban state was controlled by the U.S. occupation forces."[246] Guridy notes, however, that gender and class ideologies still influenced who became Tuskegee students. Due to patriarchal norms among Afro-Cuban parents, it is not a surprise that few women from Cuba attended the school. However, many Cubans of color considered Tuskegee an ideal place to send orphans. Though I found no letter indicating whether or not Alvarez and her brother became students, their orphan status may have made them candidates for consideration.

Significantly, numerous women sought assistance from Gómez in the absence of male providers who could support them as they pursued educational or professional opportunities. In 1912, for instance, a young teacher named Christine Ayala wrote Gómez with the hope of receiving the opportunity to take a mathematics exam. She came from a family who, according to her description, worked for the betterment of the community as educators. Both she and her brother (a PIC member) promoted racial uplift as teachers. Yet, due to an illness, her brother was no longer able to work and was therefore unable to support her financially. The Havana resident explained that not being able to depend on "good fortune nor father, son, or husband," she needed his help. Ayala

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[245] Guridy, *Forging Diaspora*.
[246] Guridy, *Forging Diaspora*, 21.

thus looked to Gómez to serve as a paternal figure who could help her professionally as an educator in the absence of a male family member.

Although Afro-Cuban women pursued education as a strategy for social mobility, many soon realized that their training did not ensure access to employment. In March of 1908, Carmela López Garrido sent a letter to Gómez requesting his assistance in securing a position. A certified typist, López worked diligently to find employment in Havana. She saw Gómez as her last hope. Though she primarily wrote the letter in Spanish, she explained in English that she hoped that he would pay attention to her solicitude, writing "because I think it is very hard to be not working perfectly knowing my trade." She wrote in both English and Spanish in order to emphasize her skills as a bilingual typist. López, like many women, venerated Gómez as a man greatly committed to "the advancement and culture" of the colored race.[247]

Institutional racism also affected women such as María Amparo Callara, who worked as an educator. In February of 1912, Callara claimed that she would soon board a train to Havana in order to meet the Secretary of Public Works to raise concerns about recent issues of discrimination within her school in Pinar del Río. In her letter, Callara explained that the director of the school in which she worked "established inequalities between" between them "for the fact that I am of the opposite race of her and in her judgment inferior in every way."[248] Frustrated, she turned to the superintendent for support. Rather than address her concerns, the superintendent opted to maintain his distance from the incident. Frustrated, Callara concluded in her letter to Gómez: "This is

[247] Fondo Adquisiciones Legajo 29, Expediente 2163, ANC.
[248] Fondo Adquisiciones Legajo 13, Expediente 666, ANC.

without a doubt the aspect that has led me to realize that I am still not seen; in this situation, it may not be possible to see the light of truth and justice."[249] Her letter highlights the frustration that many women of color felt when experiencing racial discrimination. Afro-Cuban women who confronted discrimination were well aware of the prevailing racial ideologies used to justify their marginalization, as well as the manifestations of such perspectives in daily interactions between whites and Cubans of color. Even when recognizing that their endeavors might not be fruitful, women such as Callara took an active role in challenging prejudice in order to assert their rights as citizens.

Many women who sent letters to Gómez sought to alleviate their immediate material concerns by requesting pensions earned by themselves and male family members. For example, in 1919, Rita Baldoquin, the niece of a Liberation Army general from of Manzanillo, wrote Gómez after the state stopped her uncle's pension without reason. She described her uncle as "a man that is incapable of reclaiming anything" due to poor health. [250] As she explained, "seeing that he is old and infirm I have wanted to handle some business for him, as there are many who have done so much patriotic work and maybe less and yet enjoy more than him." [251] She believed that Gómez was "the only person who can do something for the colored race."[252] Believing that he took a particular

[249] Fondo Adquisiciones Legajo 13, Expediente 666, ANC.
[250] Adquisiciones Legajo 11, Expediente 445, ANC. Letter published in Leopoldo Horrego Estuch and Oilda Hevia Lanier's *Juan Gualberto Gómez: Un gran inconforme* (Habana: Ciencias Sociales, 2004): 301.
[251] Adquisiciones Legajo 11, Expediente 445, ANC.
[252] Adquisiciones Legajo 11, Expediente 445, ANC.

interest in the plight of Cubans of color, she sought his help in maintaining the financial security of her uncle and family.

Baldoquin's letter is among hundreds submitted to Gómez that requested help in obtaining pensions. Many women solicited pensions from the state on behalf of their lost husbands and, on occasion, emphasized their military service during the nineteenth century independence movement. Pensions were among the main concerns expressed by veterans and their families during the early decades of the republic. In 1923, Gabriela Oliva Viuda de Sausa, a widow from Cienfuegos, sent a letter to Gómez in pursuit of state support for her family.[253] Almost a year had passed since she had last received a payment from her late husband's pension. As she lived far from her family, Viuda de Sausa struggled to care for her two daughters and her mother. She badly needed Gómez's assistance. A friend of her late father, Domingo L. Oliva, and her brother, Rafael, Gómez was one of the few connections Viuda de Sausa had to then President Alfredo Zayas. She wrote Gómez "to see if you can resolve such a terrible situation as soon as possible […]."[254] She hoped that he could convince Zayas to issue a government decree that would continue to dispense pensions to men and women who had fought for national independence. By convincing them to reinstate the pension program, Viuda de Sausa hoped to remedy the grave situation of women whose families lived in poverty.

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253 Gómez received hundreds of letters regarding pensions between 1920 and 1923. This likely occurred due to the reinvigorated Veteran's Movement, which gained momentum during the early 1920s. See Robert Whitney, *State and Revolution in Cuba: Mass Mobilization and Political Change, 1920-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

254 Fondo Adquisiciones, Legajo 2688, Expediente, 35, ANC.

Reflecting on the status of her community, she lamented that "today there are so many families that have lost their *jefe*."[255]

The reality that women of color had disproportionately lost their husbands fighting for national sovereignty during the Cuban Independence Movement complicated Afro-Cuban women's aspirations for social mobility. Historian Louis Pérez estimates that there were as many as three widows in every five wives of color in 1899. Havana had the greatest number of widowed women of color: nearly four of every five wives were widowed.[256] Viuda de Sausa's letter to Gómez reflects that husbands frequently served as the breadwinners of their households. The absence of male breadwinners made even more difficult the already unstable financial situation of families struggling to survive within depressed communities of the early republican period.[257] In her memoir, *Reyita*, María de los Reyes Castillo Bueno, an Afro-Cuban woman reflecting on her life experiences, recalled how her widowed grandmother Emiliana "Mamacita" Duharte struggled financially. The wife of a free black bricklayer, Mamacita lost her husband during the Ten Years War. Soon after, Mamacita and her seven children returned to Santiago de Cuba where the family fell into poverty. As she recounted in *Reyita*, "[Mamacita] had to struggle to survive, to find shelter for herself and her children." [258] To make money, she made and sold candy in the streets. She also put out a table on festival

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[255] Fondo Adquisiciones, Legajo 2688, Expediente 35, ANC.
[256] See Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*.
[257] Helg, *Our Rightful Share,* 92-97.
[258] María de los Reyes Castillo Bueno, Daisy Rubiero Castillo and Anne McLean, *Reyita: The Life of a Black Cuban Woman in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

days.[259] Left without financial support, widowed women became the sole providers for themselves, in addition to their children and parents.

Afro-Cuban women's letters to Gómez illustrate the ways in which women utilized political networks during the early twentieth century in their pursuit for racial advancement, petitioning the state for aid in a society in which only men possessed legal citizenship. Their letters demonstrate that many elite and aspiring-class women viewed the right to an education and employment as a key component of republican womanhood. Often, women appealed to patriarchal gender norms, asserting their roles as mothers, nieces, and sisters who took care of their families. In some cases, the archive included follow-up letters in which women thanked Gómez for his assistance. However, none of the examples provided here included such letters. While unable to ascertain the outcomes of each woman's request, I emphasize the language that they used because it is important for examining how Afro-Cuban women articulated patriarchal discourses of racial progress through political networks and in relation to familial ties. In addition, many women cited their concerns as members of or working in the interest of "the race," demonstrating that they drew connections between their individual concerns and overall racial and community improvement.

CONCLUSION

Through published articles and poetry within Afro-Cuban periodicals, as well as letters sent to prominent community leaders, elite and aspiring-class Afro-Cuban women drew

[259] Castillo Bueno, Rubiero Castillo, and McLean, *Reyita*.

from patriarchal understandings of racial progress and ideas of republican womanhood to construct a sense of self that reflected their subjective positions. Their perspectives echoed evolving gender and racial ideologies during the early twentieth century. On one hand, women asserted their role in national development as caretakers and moral gatekeepers. For elite women in particular, their access to the public sphere evolved with legal reforms that altered the patriarchal family structure. One the other hand, Cubans of color believed that obtaining citizenship depended upon their ability to illustrate their cultural, intellectual, and moral advancement. Caught between both ideologies, black and mulatto women pursued racial progress as modern women committed to community and national development.

Members of the Partido Independiente de Color articulated patriarchal understandings of racial progress that resembled those formulated by Afro-Cuban *sociedades* leaders and affiliates. Women of the PIC emphasized the role and rights of men of color in realizing racial progress—to their own exclusion—both historically and within contemporary society. Women writing for *Previsión* employed a patriotic discourse that stressed birth, family, and national myths in order to connect themselves to independence war heroes such as José Martí and Antonio Maceo. Additionally, while working on behalf of the betterment of their nation and local communities, women contributed to racial uplift primarily within women's auxiliary groups rather than as society board members. Women's roles (not rights) included supporting the objectives of the movement and the organization's male leadership. Thus, as women of the PIC articulated a gendered racial identity in relation to broader currents in Cuban thought,

they refrained from placing emphasis on the rights of women. The PIC did not serve as the only space in which women identified as members of the colored race, but it does provide a glimpse into women's racialized thinking.

Afro-Cuban feminist writings demonstrate that women of color began participating in the Cuban women's movement as early as 1910, working as community feminists who uplifted the race through moral instruction and education. However, though writing during a period of increased racial tensions, black and mulatto feminists employed race in a different manner than the women of the PIC. Both groups of women utilized the label *raza de color* (the colored race), yet they appealed to individual actions toward racial progress rather than critiquing racism. Feminists strove to empower women by asserting their essential role to the development of communities and nation. Furthermore, their emphasis on education paralleled white elite and middle-class feminist discourses. These discourses would continue to evolve with the reformulation of gender norms within the legal structure.

Letter writing provided a particularly important strategy for pursuing mobility and challenging racism. Moreover, women who sent letters to political figures such as Gómez sought to alleviate their material struggles by obtaining pensions and gaining labor and education opportunities. They did so as members of the colored race, and many noted their identities to establish commonalities with Gómez because they were aware of his commitment to racial advancement. Utilizing letters to consider how Afro-Cuban women articulated the patriarchal discourses of racial progress reveals a range of perspectives defined by socioeconomic standing. Such an approach also demonstrates that women of

color tapped into political networks in ways overlooked by studies that examine citizenship in relation to suffrage and the right to hold public office. Indeed, the letters underscore that women saw education, freedom from discrimination, and their ability to provide for their families as fundamental rights.

Chapter Three will examine Afro-Cuban women's engagement with patriarchal discourses of racial progress by focusing on the realm of visual culture. As Cubans of color asserted their humanity, self-fashioning within photographic portraits became just as important for pursuing advancement as did demonstrating their intellectual, cultural, and moral attainments. Chapter Three also shows that visual documents were just as important as written texts for examining racial and gender ideologies during the early republic.

CHAPTER THREE

Visualizing Progress: Afro-Cuban Womanhood, Sexual Politics, and Photography

Two years after the end of slavery in Cuba, the December 1888 issue of the Afro-Cuban women's magazine *Minerva: Revista quincenal dedicada a la mujer de color* (*Minerva: Biweekly Magazine Dedicated to the Woman of Color*, 1888–1890) featured an engraving of the elite socialite and contributing writer Úrsula Coimbra Valverde on its cover (figure 1).[260] In the ornate illustration, she faces forward, her head and gaze extended towards her left. She wears her hair pulled away from her face in a high bun. Her clothing is dark and tailored to her body to create a simple silhouette that reflects the fashions of the period. The cover image appeared in the same issue in which Coimbra published an article in response to a letter sent by Doña Pastora Ramírez de Calvo. In her letter,

Figure 1: "Úrsula Coimbra Valverde," *Minerva* (15 December 1888).

[260] The issue refers to the image as a *grabado*. *Minerva: Revista quincenal dedicada a la mujer de color* 15 December 1888.

Ramírez expressed her admiration for Coimbra as a "distinguished sister of the race."[261] Coimbra responded by echoing her appreciation. She then briefly analyzed the oppression of Afro-Cuban women that had existed for "some four hundred years" due to their "weak" sex and racial identity. Coimbra called upon Ramírez and other elite women of color to "indignantly lift our head and make a titanic effort to regain the dignity granted by the heavens to our race."[262] Together, the article by and the illustration of Coimbra represented the community of elite Afro-Cuban women committed to uplifting the community of color within post-emancipation society.

Figure 2: "Úrsula Coimbra Valverde," *El Nuevo Criollo* (17 December 1904).

Less than two decades later, in 1904, a photographic portrait of Coimbra (figure 2) appeared on the cover of the Afro-Cuban newspaper *El Nuevo*

[261] Ursula Coimbra Valverde. "A la Señora Doña Pastora Ramírez de Calvo," *Minerva: Revista quincenal dedicada a la mujer de color* 15 December 1888.
[262] "A la Señora Doña Pastora Ramírez de Calvo."

Criollo (1904–1906).[263] While her stance is similar to that of the earlier image, it reveals details undisclosed in the engraving. For instance, Coimbra wears a light-colored dress with heavy fabric that is tailored. Dark-colored stripes add simple, yet sophisticated details. She wears an accessory—possibly a bow—at the nape of her neck. Her waist is cinched with a dark-colored ribbon or belt. The light, draws attention to her eyes, which are looking away from the camera lens, and accents her fair, brown skin. Coimbra's wavy hair is pulled away from her face and adorned with light-colored flowers. Finally, by incorporating an aesthetic technique that was typical of the contemporary artistic tradition pictorialism, the photographer created a dream-like vision by placing gauze over the camera lens.[264]

What might it have meant for *El Nuevo Criollo* readers to see a photograph of Coimbra rather than an engraving? What did a photograph reveal about its subject that an etching could not? And what might this distinction in visual representation have signified for Afro-Cuban women sitters, as well as magazine and newspaper editors, within the context of evolving gender norms and Afro-Cuban struggles for equality during the early years of the republic? As explained by visual culture scholar Shawn Michelle Smith, during the early years of photography, many Americans came to think of it as a way to capture the "true essence" of the sitters.[265] Individuals believed that photographs elucidated a person's inner attributes, whether virtuous, noble, and honorable, or criminal and socially deviant. From this perspective, Coimbra's photographic portrait portrayed

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[263] *El Nuevo Criollo* 17 December 1904.
[264] William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature* (New York: Hans P. Kraus, 1989).
[265] Shawn Michelle Smith, *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999)

her feminine quintessence as woman committed to both racial and national progress. Her clothing and stance, as well as the aesthetic techniques employed in the production of the image, sought to affirm her respectability.

As I argued in the previous chapters, elite and aspiring-class women of color fused ideas of republican womanhood with patriarchal discourses of racial progress, challenging racial discrimination and stereotypes of Afro-Cuban women's moral, cultural, and intellectual inferiority while also asserting their role within the public sphere as educated and moral leaders. Linking the visual representations of Coimbra to this context, I am particularly interested in Afro-Cuban photographic portraits and what they signified for the photographers and sitters, as well as a periodical's editors and readers. By considering patriarchal discourses of racial progress in relation to photographic portraits published in books and periodicals of the early twentieth century, this chapter demonstrates that visual documents were just as important for pursuing racial advancement as written texts. I contend that by posing for and publishing photographic portraits, Afro-Cuban women and their families helped construct a visual narrative of progress in which elite women engaged in a self-fashioning that countered the negative portrayals of black and mulatto women. Moreover, I argue that the photographs both reflected and informed racial and gender ideologies among Afro-Cuban women and, as such, worked in conjunction with published articles and poetry to help create patriarchal discourses of racial progress.[266]

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[266] Anne Elizabeth Carroll argues that African Americans of the Harlem Renaissance used both written and visual texts to create ideas about themselves and to redefine their identity. See *Word, Image and the New Negro: Representation and Identity in the Harlem Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press,

How did patriarchal discourses of racial progress inform Afro-Cuban studio portraiture during the opening decades of the republican era? During this period, technological improvement made photography more affordable and popular, leading more elite and aspiring-class Afro-Cubans to sit for photographic portraits. Mass periodical editors began regularly publishing photographic images, as they found it cheaper to reproduce photographs in their publications. As such, progress emerged on the pages of Afro-Cuban publications with newspapers and magazines printing private photographic portraits of *culta* (cultured) and *distinguida* (distinguished) women on their covers, in their social pages, and alongside feature articles. Photographers and Afro-Cuban female subjects also sought to illustrate progress through the staging of each photographic portrait, orchestrated through the use of poses, props, and settings. Finally, many editors used captions and biographical sketches alongside photographs to highlight the professional and social accomplishments of black and mulatto women. The link between Cubans of color, community, and the myriad forms of social advancement were irrefutable for the elite—a link that made sense and was important to make during a period when Cubans found themselves preoccupied with gender, race, class, and national origins in determining citizenship and the allocation of rights and resources.

As numerous studies of visual culture have demonstrated, photographic representations of individuals of African descent were an important part of self-fashioning during this drive to create a national culture in a post-emancipation society.[267]

2007). Also see, WJT Mitchell, *Picture Theory Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

267 Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black"

However, few studies have conceived of this cultural practice among people of African descent beyond the United States.[268] This chapter expands the current body of literature on self-fashioning by examining photographic portraits of elite Afro-Cuban women by focusing on representational practices employed by the sitters themselves, as well as the photographers and viewers. I argue that their methods of self-fashioning are simultaneously informed by early twentieth-century understandings of race, gender, sexuality, and progress in terms of collective improvement and individual mobility. By contextualizing photographic portraits of women of color within discourses of sexual morality and racial progress, I suggest that photographic portraits serve as an alternative narrative of Afro-Cuban female identity.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This chapter underscores the importance of photographic portraiture as visual texts that established and contested understandings of race, gender, nation, and progress. In studying photographic portraits of elite Afro-Cuban women, I analyze the images as "semiotic signs that carried clearly coded cultural meanings for their viewers."[269] This approach is particularly useful for the medium of photography, and in particular those photographs that appeared within Afro-Cuban and national publications. In these visual

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Representations 24 (Fall 1998): 129-155; Smith, *American Archives*; Deborah Willis and Carla Williams, *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002); Deborah Willis, *Picturing Us*.

[268] One exception is Richard J. Powell's *Cutting a Figure: Fashioning Black Portraiture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

[269] Caroline Goeser. *Picturing the New Negro: Harlem Renaissance Print Culture and Modern Black Identity* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997): viii; Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Matthew Brady to Walker Evans*. (New York: Hill and Wang Press, 1989): 6.

images, sitters and photographers followed contemporary stylistic trends to communicate respectability and cultural refinement to create emblematic hallmarks of exemplary womanhood. In addition, I make use of current studies of visual and material culture to highlight the connections between visual representations, cultural production, and history, which reveal the ways social relationships and knowledge are formulated through images. Scholar Alan Trachtenberg, for example, explains, "Images become history, more than traces of a specific event in the past, when they are used to interpret the present in light of the past, when they are presented and received as explanatory accounts of collective reality. They become history when they are conceived as symbolic events in a shared culture."[270] Trachtenberg's study informs my position that photography is a cultural practice that reflects the intentions of its subjects and the photographers. Moreover, he emphasizes that photographs "represent a specific moment in the past," yet the meanings behind these representations are not fixed—"what an image shows depends on how and where and when, and by whom, it is seen."[271]

Accordingly, this chapter probes the meanings behind Afro-Cuban photographic portraiture through a consideration of "self-fashioning," a practice of representation shaped by and in response to hegemonic understandings of blackness, womanhood, and *cubanidad* (Cuban identity). I understand self-fashioning as a practice of representation through which individuals create the specific visual message they want to communicate. Within the visual medium of photography, a subject's adornment, locale, and projected disposition, among other factors, serve as strategies for demonstrating one's lifestyle and

[270] Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs*, 6.
[271] Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs*, 20.

accomplishments (as fantasized or actually lived) within a given moment.[272] This chapter argues that photographic representations both reflect and create cultural meanings. As scholar Shawn Michelle Smith states in her study of American identity formation, "…photographic images not only represent but also reproduce the nation."[273] I extend Smith's analysis to consider the ways in which—when juxtaposing Afro-Cuban's own photographic portraiture with the stereotypical representations of blacks and mulattoes within the dominant culture—Cubans of color created alternative narratives of blackness or gendered models of Afro-Cuban identity that attempted to subverted racist conventions. I contend that self-fashioning through photography became a way for blacks and mulattoes to illustrate their progress before the community and nation at large.[274]

Finally, this chapter draws from studies of photography and technological reproduction to examine published Afro-Cuban photographic portraits as mass-produced and mass-circulated documents. The work of theorist Walter Benjamin is particularly useful to my analysis. Benjamin argued: "technological reproduction can place the copy of the original in situations which the original itself cannot attain."[275] In other words, photography serves as a modern form of technology that—especially when published in a book or periodical—can reach a mass audience. Moreover, the potential for the mass-

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[272] For example, Richard J. Powell writes that, "Despite a sobering legacy of scorn and subjugation, people of African descent have psychologically 'clothed' themselves in fancier attire than others customarily allowed them, enacting personas that inspire awe and provide assurances about their place among life's movers and shakers." See *Cutting a Figure*, xvi.

[273] Smith, *American Archives*.

[274] David Levering Lewis and Deborah Willis, *A Small Nation of People: W.E.B. DuBois and African American Portraits of Progress* (New York: Amistad, Harper Collins Press, 2003); Richard J. Powell, *Cutting a Figure*.

[275] Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technical Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, Ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Coherty, Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008): 21.

circulation of personal photographic portraits demonstrates its engagement with modern politics.[276] In her examination of civil rights photography, art historian Cherise Smith notes that "As an authoritative representation, the photographic image in black and white is the quintessential document: the authority of newspaper and magazine text printed in black and white legitimates and authorizes the photograph. […] Photographs are human endeavors, the result of a decision-making process that is undeniably framed by social ideology."[277] This chapter builds on the work of both Benjamin and Smith to consider the political struggle for authority that takes place in the production of Afro-Cuban photographic portraiture.[278]

Rather than mere appendages to newspaper or magazine articles, Afro-Cuban photographic portraits complemented printed documents to create an alternative narrative of blackness and a patriarchal agenda for racial progress. Some articles included photographs, often depicting columnists or the daughters and wives of magazine editors; others had no accompanying caption or feature article. Yet within a periodical, photographic representations of women of color became visual narratives that expressed the morality, cultural refinement, and intellectual development of the subjects to a larger audience. As such, the chapter demonstrates that photographic images possessed their own discursive strivings.

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[276] Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technical Reproducibility*, 27.
[277] Cherise Smith, "In Black and White: Constructing History and Meaning in Civil Rights Photography." In *Let My People Go: Cairo, Illinois, 1967-1973*, Edited by Jan Peterson Roddy (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996): 83-94.
[278] Also see Anne Elizabeth Carroll, *Word, Image, and the New Negro*.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND RACISM IN CUBA

In 1841, an unknown North American from New Orleans established the first photography studio in Cuba. By the end of the nineteenth century, technological improvements made equipment and production costs more affordable, leading to an increase in professional photographers and photography studios. During the first half of the twentieth century, portraits of political and high-society figures, public acts, banquets, parties, and new architectural works were the most frequently published images in the Cuban press.[279] Mainstream periodicals such as *Gráfico* (founded in 1913) and *Social* (1916–1933 and 1935–38) facilitated an innovation of photographic images by breaking with the traditional poses of the initial period and documenting public events and urban life. The late-nineteenth and early twentieth century also witnessed the rise of documentary and scientific photography. For instance, Cuban anthropologist Israel Castellanos utilized the late-nineteenth century daguerreotypes by the French photographer Henri Dumont in his early twentieth century studies of ethnic culture among African and African-descended slaves living in Cuba.[280] As the techniques used to create photographic representations evolved, the ideas of gender, racial, and ethnic

[279] Ana Vera, "La fotografia y el trabajo a principios del siglo XX," In *Historia y memoria: sociedad, cultura y vida cotidiana en Cuba, 1878-1917* (La Habana: Centro de Investigacion y Desarollo de la Cultura Cubana Juan Marinello, 2003): 188-189.
[280] See *Revista Bimestre Cubana* (vol. X., 1915 and vol. XI, 1916); Gabino La Rosa Corzo, "Henri Dumont y la imagen antropoligica del esclavo africano en Cuba." In *Historia y memoria: sociedad, cultura y vida cotidiana en Cuba, 1878-1917* (La Habana: Centro de Investigacion y Desarollo de la Cultura Cubana Juan Marinello, 2003): 175-182.

differences that remained central to the portrayal of modernity and national progress could be more easily and affordably expressed through images.[281]

During the first decades of the Republican era, eugenicists linked human fitness and assumptions of racial difference to national progress. Early eugenicist ideas asserted that society's advancement depended upon the success of environmental and reformist projects in the fields of public health and education. To transmit these ideas into Cuban culture, the state initiated several institutions and projects in the hopes of facilitating larger discussions on the state of the nation and racial superiority. For instance, in 1915, the Ministry of Hygiene and Welfare established "beautiful baby" contests. Utilizing photographic portraits of young, white children, beautiful baby contests emphasized the idea that environmental conditions could bring about racial "progress"—that Cuba could build a strong population through moral, hygienic, and physiological improvements.[282] The contests were widely advertised and received support from businesses throughout the island. Through such practices, photography quickly evolved into a key strategy for portraying the healthy, clean, and moral environmental conditions of Cuban citizens—even if the photographer staged the photographs.

Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century visual representations of blackness in Cuba overwhelmingly drew from scientific and cultural images of Afro-Cuban social and sexual deviance, juxtaposed with assumptions of white moral and cultural superiority.

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[281] Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs*; Robert Levine, *Images of History: Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Latin American Photographs as Documents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990); Deborah Poole, *Vision, Race, and Modernity: A Visual Economy of the Andean World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

[282] Bronfman, *Measures of Equality: Social Science, Race, and Citizenship in Cuba, 1902-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004): 117-124.

Because eugenicists equated whiteness with national progress, they promoted blacks' inherent inferiority, suggesting that blacks' "immoral" character and "criminal" behavior served as the cause of the degeneration of the Afro-Cuban community. Numerous published reports asserted that the community of color had entered a state of physical and moral deterioration following emancipation. For example, in 1915, Cuban social scientist Jorge Le-Roy y Cassá published a study in which he suggested that black female mortality was higher than white female mortality. Le-Roy y Cassá implied that the "'colored' race was slowly disappearing from the national territory."[283] Contemporary medical expert Gustavo Mustelier suggested that this process occurred largely because of Afro-Cubans' lower rate of natural population increase, which he claimed was due to the large number of Afro-Cuban females who served as sex workers and the number of males in prison.[284] Drawing from statistical data in the areas of health and criminality, scientists and politicians assumed that cultural inferiority and immoral behavior threatened the vitality of the community of color. Such assumptions of racial difference became manifest in visual representations of African culture, anthropological studies of the black body (male and female), and medical discourses that highlighted the unhealthiness of Afro-Cuban children. Furthermore, scientific racialist theories suggested that people of color were incapable of political participation and presented them as a threat to the progress of the nation.

Though informed by scientific discourses, visual and literary images of Afro-Cuban women reinforced the negative stereotypes of the sensual *mulata* and sexually

[283] Bronfman, *Measures of Equality*, 45-46.
[284] Bronfman, *Measures of Equality*, 46.

deviant black female, which were established during the slave era. In the nineteenth century, for instance, paintings and lithographs created by artists such as the Basque painter Victor Landaluze depicted women of color as sensual *mulatas* objectified for the pleasure of men or as black servants passing through the streets wearing simple white dresses with brightly-colored shawls who privately aspired to the extravagant lifestyles of their masters.

Perhaps the most frequently used medium for portraying racial dynamics in relation to the black female body was the *marquillas*, or lithographic cigar wrappers used as a marketing tool for Cuban manufacturers. Emerging as a focal point of Cuban cigars in the 1840s, the *marquillas* served as representations of Cuba's national identity and social structure. During the nineteenth century, the *marquillas* became a popular collector's item, circulated as a status symbol among elite circles in Cuba and the United States, and throughout Europe and Latin America. Art Historian Dolores Mitchell notes,

> Images of women of color in tobacco art were designed for white manufacturers by white male artists for a primarily white male audience. Thus, the woman on a cigar box label—became closely identified with a product that was purchased and consumed for pleasure and inserted in the mouth to be 'kissed' and sucked. A man might enjoy this pleasure in a solitary situation within his den, office, or smoking room, or he might share the pleasure with other males in a bar or club as part of a bonding ritual.[285]

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285 Mitchell, Delores. "Images of Exotic Women in Turn-of-the-Century Tobacco Art." *Feminist Studies* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1992); Jill Lane, "Smoking *Habaneras*, or A Cuban Struggle with Racial Demons" *Social Text* 3, 104 (2010): 11-37; Vera Kutzinski, *Sugar's Secrets: Race and the Erotics of Cuban Nationalism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993).

Such representations placed Afro-Cuban female bodies outside the boundaries of honorable elite womanhood as defined by dominant white culture.[286] This served at least two sociopolitical purposes. First, stereotypical portrayals of black and mulatto Cuban women undermined the legitimacy of black male political agency—within a patriarchal social structure, if black men proved incapable of controlling the sexual behavior of black women, their ability to navigate the political realm as civic leaders could be questioned. Second, negative images of Afro-Cuban women not only denied them the realization of becoming key contributors to the nation's development; it also situated them as *contradictory* to national progress. Negative stereotypical images of black and mulatto women therefore reproduced hierarchal social structures that privileged white male patriarchy.

AFRO-CUBAN PHOTOGRAPHIC PORTRAITURE AND RACIAL PROGRESS

During the early twentieth century, elite and aspiring-class Cubans of color revered photographic portraits as visual representations of their progress. For purposes of racial uplift, a photograph of a consummate woman ideally reflected the achievements of a larger community and provided a model for other women to emulate. In the private realm, individuals hung photographs of their family members on the walls of their home for visitors to observe. Private photographs placed on a side table or desk captured the life events, as well as the virtue, of a spouse, sibling, or child. Within social

[286] Mena, Luz. "Stretching the Limits of Gendered Space: Black and Mulatto Women in 1830s Havana." For a discussion of elite womanhood in nineteenth-century Cuba, see Luis Martinez-Fernandez's "The 'Male City' of Havana: The Coexisting Logics of Colonialism, Slavery, and Patriarchy in Nineteenth-Century Cuba."

organizations, such as Club Atenas of Havana, officials hung photographic portraits of their most prominent members and families on the walls of their lodges. Editors of Club Atenas's publications frequently printed individual photographic portraits—in particular, pictures of women—within their social pages. Whether circulated among friends and family or displayed in the home or on the walls of a society hall, photographs provided viewers with the opportunity to peer into the lives of the men and women who represented the achievements and aspirations of the community of color.

Blacks and mulattoes living in Cuba during the early twentieth century understood that they could not completely escape the racial insults and systemic discrimination that existed during the late colonial era. Attacks on Afro-Cuban morality and civility, in addition to exclusion from educational and political institutions, were recurring features of daily life for Cubans of color. Thus, the early twentieth century witnessed two overlapping developments that reified assumptions of racial difference. First, the use of negative stereotypical representations of blackness within photography and advertisements and on consumer products led to the proliferation of sexualized racial discourses in popular culture. Second, the institutionalization of scientific racism and liberal reforms maintained Afro-Cuban exclusion from the rights of full citizenship.[287] In order to challenge mainstream assertions of black cultural inferiority, Afro-Cuban magazine and newspaper editors participated in this new era of racial representation. Publications such as *El Nuevo Criollo* (1904–1906), *Minerva: Revista Universal Ilustrada* (1910–1915), and *Labor Nueva* (1915–1916) presented alternative visual

[287] Bronfman, *Measures of equality*.

representations by depicting Cubans of color that proclaimed their "respectability" and projected a model of self-presentation and social behavior for the Afro-Cuban community to emulate.

To achieve their goals, Afro-Cuban publications of the early twentieth century published photographic portraits of its contributors and readers on their covers and throughout their pages. It is likely that the published photographs were voluntarily submitted or taken by one of the newspaper's featured photographers—Rogelio Valdés, Germiniano Zurbanía, and Ramón Carreras—as the editors never published an official call for photographs. On one occasion, Valdés offered *Minerva*'s subscribers a discounted rate of 60 cents in exchange for patronizing his Havana studio.[288] While some photographs featured the authors of individual articles, others presented members of the larger community, including social and political organizations. Many photographic portraits represented young Cubans of color in individual studio portraits, and those that portrayed children of the community rarely featured men and women within the same photograph. Each photographic representation focused the subject within the conceptual framework of decency, thereby highlighting the subject's moral virtue and high cultural standing and contradicting stereotypical images of blacks as sexually deviant, violent, and culturally ignorant. More importantly, the photographs featured Cubans of color in control of their own images for public and private consumption. Thus, photographs published within Afro-Cuban magazines and newspapers functioned as visual testimonies of Afro-Cuban cultural practices among elites and the aspiring class.

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[288] See "Gran ocasión," *Minerva* 1 November 1910, 21.

Though editors published articles for both male and female readers, the majority of published photographs featured Afro-Cuban women, and women graced the cover of almost every issue. As a commodity accessible mainly to members of the elite and aspiring classes, photographic portraits depicted Afro-Cuban women as the ideal model of genteel female behavior. Furthermore, as photographers, portrait sitters, and editors articulated a highly politicized, alternative narrative of Afro-Cuban female identity, they aimed to "produce beauty," drawing from an image of beauty that did not appear within visual representations of white dominant culture.[289]

Consuelo Serra was an exemplary Afro-Cuban woman recognized by the community of color for her morality and intellectual accomplishments. As a student at the New York Normal Institute, Serra fought to make a name for herself, maintaining her "mission to defend and exalt Cuba in a foreign school."[290] After she graduated with "the highest and most dignified marks," her father Rafael Serra, the well-known Afro-Cuban patriot, celebrated the occasion "a deserved tribute" to Consuelo and chose to "express physically *through a portrait* (emphasis mine)" his pride to the Afro-Cuban community. The June 18, 1905, cover of *El Nuevo Criollo* featured Consuelo Serra as its single, central image (figure 3). On page three, an article, along with another image, celebrates her as a young *triunfadora* (victor). Heralded as the "kind and intelligent" daughter of the Afro-Cuban independence war veteran, an unnamed contributor examined Consuelo's character in great detail. The writer regarded Consuelo as a distinguished leader of her community

[289] Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999): 4.
[290] "Consuelo Serra y Heredia," *El Nuevo Criollo* 18 June 1905.

who had pushed herself "to her ultimate limit," which was one of her many traits to be admired. The writer hoped that the photograph would serve as "satisfaction, encouragement and consolidation" for other Cubans. In particular, the author suggested that readers "take pride" in the ability of individuals to prove their intellectual capability—a triumph "conquered in foreign countries."[291] Thus, Consuelo Serra's accomplishments became an important means of illustrating the progress of Cubans in the United States, as well as Cubans of color living on the island.[292] As the author revered Serra for her commitment to uplifting herself and the nation through education, the writer

Figure 3: "Consuelo Serra y Heredia," *El Nuevo Criollo* (18 June 1905).

[291] "Consuelo Serra y Heredia."
[292] *See* "'Mothers of Tomorrow': The New Negro Renaissance and the Politics of Maternal Representation." *African American Review* 32, No. 4 (Winter 1998): 533-562.

identified the photographic portrait as a visual marker of progress to present before the community of color.

Each aspect of the images takes on particular importance, signifying Serra's virtue and professional accomplishments—characteristics that he links to collective mobility. In the first photograph, Serra sits upright in a chair, her right hand placed on a table, her left hand resting in her lap. Her right leg is raised slightly above her left, resting atop a footrest. She wears dark shoes and a long, dark-colored skirt, which is accented by a dark-colored belt and two chain loops that dangle from its metal buckle. Her light-colored blouse has a high-neck collar, puffy shoulders, and long sleeves that are tapered at the wrists. Serra's hair is pulled into one of the popular hairstyles of the time, and though her coarse hair texture is visible, a dark-colored bow or hair-tie sits at the nape of her neck. Serra's modest outfit and proper pose represent her morality. Her appearance and the setting of the photograph create an idealized model of domestic womanhood. The objects in the image replicate a decorous sitting room where women greeted and entertained their guests. The table is covered in an ornate cloth, and on top of it sits a bouquet of light-colored flowers. Behind her stands a column on which sits a light-colored, oblong vase; a tall plant with long, thin leaves stands at the back of the room. To Serra's left is a backdrop that depicts a terrace scene. It is detailed with a representation of iron window decorations, more columns, and plants. Each carefully selected prop—flowers, table, columns, and decorated backdrop—creates a model image of domestic virtue, feminizing Serra as a respectable woman who represented the community of color in addition to her personal achievements.

Many photographic portraits of Afro-Cuban women during the early twentieth century depicted sitters in domestic settings in order to project a sense of moral leadership of both the nation and their families. This portrait of Serra is exemplary in that regard. Placed in a studio setting that recreates a parlor setting, she sits upright and confident. Her confidence affirms her place within the private realm.

Figure 4: "Consuelo Serra y Heredia," *El Nuevo Criollo* (18 June 1905).

Serra's attire further emphasizes her respectability. Simple in form, long, and tailored, her outfit typifies elite and middle-class women's fashion at the turn of the century. As a young educator who had recently returned to Cuba to begin her career, her proper attire illustrates her effort to positively represent her race abroad. At the time, fashion and clothing were also political in the sense that they were one means by which gender identities and positions could be challenged and contested.[293] Yet as much as wearing contemporary fashions reflected a level of moral and material attainment, the

[293] Malcolm Bernard, *Fashion as Communication* (London: Routledge Press, 1996): 6.

props utilized within the photographic image served as "dream objects" through which the sitter and photographer created a visual narrative of domestic womanhood to be ascertained by the viewer.

Serra's photographic portrait is similar to those of white elite and middle-class women published during the early twentieth century. Early twentieth-century magazines such as *Cuba y América*, *Bohemia*, and *Mariposa*, included photographs of individual female sitters wearing simple, tailored clothing. Most subjects appeared within domestic settings, rather than in ones own parlor or in a studio. Like the photographic images of Serra, those featuring white women incorporated props—such as clothing, jewelry, and flowers—to imply feminine morality, cultural refinement, and material achievement.

Numerous photographic portraits published within Afro-Cuban periodicals presented women as admirable and educated figures, exhibiting their intellectual accomplishments and exemplary morality. In the photographic portrait published on page three (figure 4), Serra sits in what appears to be the same studio. The image is closely cropped to frame her body. Her left arm sits in her lap; her right arm rests on a covered table next to a bouquet of flowers. She wears her graduation ensemble: a long, dark-colored gown and a cap with a tassel. The gown is open, exposing a light-colored, high-neck collar blouse framed with detailing and a dark-colored skirt. Serra's hair is pulled away from her face and pinned at the top of her head to accentuate her regal face, and she wears round, light-colored earrings.

In both photographs, Serra gazes away from the camera and appears to be absorbed in thought. Trachtenberg's foundational study of photography in the United

States highlights the importance of a subject's gaze within photographic representations. Trachtenberg explains that "Not only would an intimate gaze into the eyes of a viewer be unseemly, but the distant look, the guise of introspection or reflection, allows the characteristic lines of the face and the weight of the body to display themselves without distraction. Unawareness is precisely the mode befitting the illustrious performing as American icons."[294] He compares the decentered gaze of photographic subjects to ancient Roman busts, a strategy through which subjects conveyed their high stature. Similarly, Serra's gaze signaled her refinement and upper class standing.

While the portraits of Serra illustrate her class status for the readers of *El Nuevo Criollo*, it is possible that the photographs were originally created for private use rather than publication in a periodical. As such, the images may have been taken to distribute to a close circle of friends and family and served as artifacts that captured the young Serra at a pivotal moment in her life—as a young, recently educated woman—to be hung on the wall of a living room, framed and placed on a table, or sent as a postcard to a family member in another city.

Once published in a book or periodical, however, the photographs signified something different. Published photographic portraits altered the boundaries of intimacy created within each photograph, allowing a magazine or newspaper's readership to glimpse into the sitter's personal life. As such, photographic representations printed in periodicals left the documents open to evaluation by the public. Yet the intentions behind the creation of

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294 Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs*, 46.

the image did not change. Rather, what changed was the dynamic between the subject and viewer, for a mass-produced document such as a newspaper or magazine extended beyond the subject's intimate circle and permitted a great number of viewers to see and comment on the photograph. For elite Cubans of color, such as Serra, visual self-representations helped men and women communicate their ability to conform to hegemonic understandings of moral and intellectual progress before a larger, national, and even international audience. Each element of a photographic image helped to illustrate the attainments and aspirations of the sitter, creating an individual narrative that dialogued with contemporary Cuban discourses of race, sexuality, and progress.

STAGING RACIAL PROGRESS THROUGH ADORNMENT PRACTICES

As Afro-Cuban visions of advancement and racial progress relegated women to the domestic sphere, photographic portraiture became one vehicle through which they might exact some measure of control over their imagery. Whether reflecting the aspirations or realities of the sitters, photographers and their Afro-Cuban female subjects utilized gestures, clothing, material objects, and settings to convey virtue and affluence. Historian Mary Warner Marien details the behind-the-scenes process of staging a photographic image:

> [Studio] owners might employ fashion and hair stylists, while less expensive venues too began to provide visual symbols of personal achievement and economic success for their portraits. Plain backgrounds were replaced by painted backdrops, such as garden scenes, and studio

> props such as columns, chairs, tables, rugs, books, sculptures, and flowers were added to express the sitter's interests, attitudes, or aspirations.[295]

These techniques of representation—though traceable to the tradition of European portrait painting—emerged during the mid-nineteenth century and became a standard photographic practice by the early 1900s, as new technological innovations made studio portraits more affordable.[296]

The placement of Serra in a chair within a domestic interior frames her femininity in a particular light: a cultured woman with the composure and social attainments of a respectable woman. Whether taken in her home or a photographer's studio, the use of props, fashion, position, and background underscores the photographs' conceptual distance from the majority of Afro-Cuban female images in early twentieth-century Cuban visual culture. Completely unlike caricatures published as advertisements, product labels, and political cartoons, the photographic representations of Serra fashion an alternative history of women of color in visual culture—one in which they are capable subjects who engage in self-fashioning.

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[295] Mary Warner Marien, *Photography: A Cultural History*, (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2002): 68.
[296] Marien, *Photography: A Cultural History*.

Four years after the publication of Consuelo Serra's photographic portraits in *El Nuevo Criollo*, the editors of *Minerva* featured Esperanza Díaz, a young Afro-Cuban socialite, on the cover of its September 1910 issue. In the photographic portrait, Díaz sits in an elaborate chair near a desk. The dark chair has a high back, carved into a triad of textured, circular forms. Díaz's clothing projects her virtue by highlighting her social standing in terms of the extravagant femininity characteristic of the Edwardian period.[297] She wears a round, light-colored hat that covers her hair, and her light-colored dress covers her entire body as it falls to the floor. Her sleeves are cut to just below the elbows. Though the dress is simple in form, its fabric is ornately detailed. Made of lace or beading, the dress features a circular design in its bell-shaped skirt and multiple lines constitute the trim that frames the bottom of the dress. A thin, shiny bracelet hangs from her right wrist.

Figure 5: "Esperanza Díaz," *Minerva* (September 1910).

[297] James Laver defines the Edwardian period as between 1900 and the outbreak of World War I, termed "la belle époque" in France. See *Costume and Fashion: A Concise History*, 213.

Her slightly tilted head rests against her right, clenched hand; her left hand, which lies in her lap, clutches a pair of light-colored gloves.

Similar to Serra's portraits, Díaz's sitting room suggests that of an accomplished, cultured woman. Plants and a tall, smooth column stand at the back wall, and an elaborately designed carpet covers the floor. The sitter's chair has a high back and intricate design carved into the wood. In addition to the design of the parlor space, Díaz's pose serves to project her social and cultural refinement. For example, her placement in the chair suggests a regal stature. She confidently leans to her right, crossing one leg over the other, and looks away from the viewer. By sitting as though absorbed in contemplation, Díaz's position emphasizes repose.

As the Republican period unfolded, elite Afro-Cuban women strove to invoke a vision of womanhood that implied progress—a vision that largely depended upon their attire—as they ventured beyond the domestic sphere. As explained by a writer of the periodical *Previsión*, "An elegant woman should always have the tact to dress herself, and carry in each circumstance a dress that flatters her."[298] The writer pointedly suggested that an individual's clothing emphasized her feminine status within a modernizing Cuban society. Moreover, the author recommended that a woman be conscious of how she represented herself throughout her daily activities, as her activities and appearance reflected upon both her family and race. As the 1910 *Previsión* article illustrates, the strong connection between "an elegant woman," clothing, and public representation often informed contemporary discourses of racial uplift.

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[298] "Una mujer elegante debe siempre tener tacto para vestirse, y llevar en cada cirunstancia el trajo que conviene." "La vida social en todas sus manifestaciones," *Previsión* 30 March 1910.

Díaz's decision to wear this particular dress constituted a cultural practice through which women demonstrated their sophistication in accordance with stylistic norms from the era. Visual culture theorist Roland Barthes contends that fashion constitutes part of a normative system of self-representation regulated and recognized by society.[299] When Cubans traveled from home to work, completed everyday tasks, or attended social functions, the style, fabric, and color of their clothing helped to "generate meanings" regarding their social standing.[300] In essence, social status was mapped onto the body through one's clothing, since adornment, style, and fabric visually positioned individuals within the spectrum of contemporary social hierarchies shaped by race, gender, and class distinctions. Yet, as elite Cubans of color highlighted the importance of fashion for conveying one's cultural refinement, clothing held broader implications as well.[301] In particular, Afro-Cuban women helped challenge stereotypes of black hyper-sexuality by wearing tailored, elegant clothing outside of their homes. These gendered and racialized discourses of dress and public performance influenced contemporary photographic representations.

Within photographic representations, a female sitter's attire contained notions about class status, femininity, and racial advancement. Díaz, for instance, wears a typical afternoon lawn dress from the 1910–1914 period.[302] Contrary to earlier dresses, the

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[299] *The Language of Fashion*, Edited by Andy Stafford and Michael Carter (Oxford: Berg, 2004): 7.
[300] Malcolm Bernard, *Fashion as Communication* (London: Routledge, 1996): 5.
[301] Ibid, 6.
[302] Interpretation of Diaz's dress is based upon my reading of several costume history books: Nancy Bradfield, *Costume in Detail: Women's Dress, 1730-1930* (London: Harrap Limited, 1981); Christopher Breward, *Fashion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); James Laver, *Costume and Fashion: A Concise History* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2002); John Peacock, *Fashion Since 1900: The Complete Sourcebook* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2007).

waistline of Díaz's dress is lower, "with increasing emphasis at hip and hem."[303] Afternoon dresses created for intimate gatherings at home or outdoor sporting events tended to be white, detailed with handmade embroidery, and lined with "fine white silk net." The craftsmanship of Díaz's dress reflected her social status, as it was likely tailor-made to fit her body as was typical of garments worn by wealthy women for leisurely activities. Not surprisingly, tailor-made clothes were unavailable to most Cubans. Therefore, as fashion marked the sitter's gender and class status within society, it also drew boundaries between the privileged classes and laboring poor. Díaz's attire, then, took on political significance as it reflected and reinforced inequalities.[304] Moreover, the dress served as a visual signifier of upper-class femininity for *Minerva*'s readers to replicate.

The presence of photographic portraits in Afro-Cuban publications gained new significance for Cubans of color during the 1910s. Indeed, Díaz's photograph appeared at a moment when the number of Afro-Cuban professionals had begun to rapidly increase, expanding the opportunities for blacks and mulattoes to demonstrate their advancement through the visual display of material and cultural refinement. Advertisements featured in *Minerva* claimed that items ranging from soap and milk to gloves and men's watches were "unwavering like the sun" or provided a "beautiful shine." The Havana-based company, La Excepción (Exception) stated that it provided cigars for "for people of

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[303] Nancy Bradfield, *Costume in Detail: Women's Dress, 1730-1930* (London: Harrap Limited, 1981): 343.
[304] As noted by Malcolm Barnard, "Clearly, different classes and genders have different positions within society, they have differing amounts of power and they are of higher or lower status. Fashion and clothing are profoundly political, then, as they have been maintained, or reproduced, from one generation to the next." *Fashion as Communication* (London: Routledge Press, 1996): 5.

taste." Even telephones, according to manufacturers, had become a "furniture necessity in every house where comfort and wellbeing appear."[305] Magazines promoted material culture to improve, refine, and transform the masses, and advertisers encouraged elite and aspiring-class Afro-Cubans to exhibit their economic progress though conspicuous consumption. Although the average Cuban of any race lacked the resources to purchase luxury items such as a pair of diamond earrings, advertisements sold the dream of high culture, social mobility, and modern opulence.

Notions that women's attire was inexorably linked to Afro-Cuban progress proliferated within Afro-Cuban periodicals, such as *Minerva*, among others. Fashion column writers with pen names that included "Marie Antoineta" and "Varona" identified seasonal trends or linked controversial garments to changing definitions of womanhood. Both authors regularly featured articles on fashion, detailing the appropriate fashion trends that arrived in Cuba from London and Paris. They paid great attention to the changing fabrics, colors, and design of contemporary clothing, noting, for example, when skirts became more fitted or blouses more intricate in detail. They noted that fashion was always evolving in relation to changing political contexts that produced new understandings of femininity. In a 1910 edition of *Minerva*, a fashion writer focused on how often changes in women's fashion occurred: "At this time, fashion is undergoing a state of transition. Therefore, there is no fixed style that all of society follows."[306] The author implied that women had a variety of trends to choose from when assembling an outfit. Though the columnists did not publish reader responses, the stylish outfits worn by

[305] See, for example, published ads for gloves and purses: 1 December 1910; 30 May 1911; 1 April 1911.
[306] Maria Antoinette, "Correo de Modas," *Minerva* 30 September 1910.

sitters featured in the same issues in which the articles appeared suggested that women wore modish clothing as a means of demonstrating their refinement. Fashion columns highlight that, in addition to representations of the domestic sphere, Afro-Cuban women's understandings of femininity vacillated between the Victorian ideals of pious women relegated to the private sphere and the modern bourgeois roles in which women demanded access to public politics.

As Marie Antonieta and Varona discussed women's clothing as a means of socialization, they placed elite white Cuban women who sat for photographic portraits within a larger cultural trend. By the 1900s, the republican view of fashion was that of a tool that helped women represent their femininity beyond the domestic sphere. At the same time, white elite women increasingly believed that fashion helped reify ones social standing as an exceptional woman to be revered. One fashion writer for the national Cuban newspaper *Diario de la Marina* proclaimed that "An elegant woman is twice the woman."[307] During the 1910s, the newspaper featured a regular fashion column that highlighted the latest trends throughout Europe and the United States. Similar to the Afro-Cuban writers of *Previsión* and *Minerva*, editors of the weekly *Diario de la Marina* fashion column paid close attention to the fabric, color, and skirt length of contemporary clothing. Elite and middle-class Cubans actively began to promote women's attire as a means to instruct the masses about high-culture, social relationships, and modern womanhood.

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[307] "La elegancia," *Diario de la Marina* 21 May 1912.

As stated, clothing in Cuba carried various connotations, depending upon when, where, and by whom it was worn. Diaz's attire represented the connection between status, consumption, and changing technologies within a rapidly modernizing society. For example, Diaz's short, light-colored gloves reflected the growing fashion industry and the improvements in manufacturing, which made these accessories less formal and more attainable. Fashion historian Valerie Cumming describes the early twentieth century as the "Growth of Informality" in fashion, noted through the change in style of gloves worn by women on the brink of World War I and various political developments that included the suffrage movement. During the pre-World War I period, "gloves became plainer, as if they were unintentional harbingers of future fashions."[308] Daytime suede or leather gloves tended to come in the shades of tan, brown, black, grey, white, and lavender; the style length, colors, and fabrics varied widely, (ranging from four to sixteen-button lengths, silk or wool, and a range of embroidered designs. As manufacturers managed to create a wide variety of less costly and more accessible gloves, more women could afford to buy them and participate in contemporary fashion trends.[309]

[308] Valerie Cumming, *Gloves* (New York: Drama Book Publishers, 1982). Chapter five: The Growth of Informality, 1900-1980: 78.
[309] Cumming, *Gloves*, 76-88.

While Díaz used the parlor as the scene in which to depict herself as a respectable, elegant woman, the same September 30, 1910, issue of *Minerva* published an image of society affiliate Inéz Billini (figure 6) that resembled the message of the photographic portrait of Serra in her cap and gown. Though Billini's portrait was simpler in style and composition than either Díaz's or Serra's, Billini projected the notion that intellectual development was a key factor of a woman's progress. In this photographic portrait, Billini, a light-complexioned woman, stands erect in front of a dark background. She wears a simple, light colored dress with a high neck. She holds a book in her hands and carries another under her arm. Her hair is pulled away from her face. Billini looks away from the camera to the right (viewer's left). The left side of her face is brightly lit, emphasizing her head, or intellectual activity.

Figure 6: "Inéz Billini," *Minerva* (30 September 1910).

The understated design elements that shape Billini's feminine attire, as well as the uncomplicated yet tailored structure, account for much of the photograph's simplicity. Contrasted with the plain dark backdrop, her light-colored garment gives off a serene

glow. Her blouse covers her upper arms and neck and is decorated with lace fabric that conceals her upper chest. The sleeves fall just above the elbows. Billini's separate bodice and skirt are hooked together and meet with a light-colored cloth belt. Her bell-shaped skirt hugs her hips and flares out towards the floor, and a seam or ribbon creates a tier-like configuration. Gathered at the waist, the dress appropriately frames her womanly figure. Thick, curly hair is pulled from her face and pinned at the back.

By cropping the photographic portrait to fit the frame and applying warm lighting, the photographer portrays Billini as a learned woman. Billini's physical stature creates a neoclassical air. Angled partially towards the camera, her erect stance commands respect and seriousness. The lighting across her forehead and left cheek draws attention to her facial features. Wide-eyed, she gazes away from the camera as though absorbed in thought. The intimate focus leads the viewer to focus on the lightweight volume she holds open with her fingers and on the book she holds under her arm. The position of Billini within the center of the photograph forces the viewer to look between the books and her gaze, suggesting that she stands contemplating the text's subject matter.

What did the book mean for Billini and *Minerva*'s readers? While we will never know the answer to this question, we do know that elite Cubans revered formal education and cultural development as essential to social advancement. Indeed, literacy became an essential component of elite Afro-Cubans' intellectual development following emancipation. In addition to writing books and establishing periodicals for the community of color, blacks and mulattoes published summaries of novels, such as La Sibila's *Amor y Deber* (*Love and Duty*) or Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona: A Story*, in

their newspapers; created libraries within their societies; and founded night schools to educate families. They also hosted writing competitions for the youth, offering financial prizes or publication in a literary magazine. Because literacy reflected an individual's educational achievements and provided an avenue for social mobility, the book became a marker of one's intellectual development and potential for advancement. Thus, by holding a book in the photograph, Billini calls attention to her intellectual progress on behalf of herself and her community for *Minerva*'s readers. During this period, Afro-Cubans relied on more than formal education and literary practices to distance themselves from African religious, cultural, and musical traditions that the white dominant culture regarded as backwards. Many of these white dominant cultural attitudes persisted beyond daily life and were depicted in nineteenth-century Cuban art, such as the lithographs and paintings by Basque artist Victor Landaluze. In his work, he ridiculed black bourgeois aspirations by depicting barefoot servants dressed in elite clothing with large eyes and protruding lips. Landaluze also devoted significant attention to documenting the public rituals of *ñáñigos*—members of the African-descended men's fraternity, the *Abakuá*. In an effort to refute these cruel depictions and rid themselves from the vestiges of slavery, Cubans of color used European classical music and dance to align themselves with white elite cultural practices. They also derided African customs to highlight their capacity for moral improvement and cultural development.[310]

In the photographic portrait from *Minerva*'s December 15, 1912, issue, Juana M. Mercado, an Afro-Cuban woman from the town of Villa Bejucaleña, stands in a studio

[310] Bronfman, *Measures of Equality*.

setting holding a violin and bow (figure 7). The caption featured below the image explains that Mercado was "Admired for her fine musical artistic spirit."[311] She wears a long, light colored dress. The dress is simple in form with three-quarter-length fitted sleeves. The top of her dress frames her upper body, and the skirt falls to the floor to create a bell shape. Mercado gazes toward the violin she is holding between her hand, neck and shoulder. Mercado appears in the foreground of a furnished interior setting. Though the objects in the background are not clearly visible, the darkness of the flooring contrasts with the dimly lit backdrop. The photograph is cropped to frame her body, allowing the darkness of the floor to extend from the ground and dramatically illuminate her figure. Long, thin plant leaves extend into the corner behind her left (viewer's right) shoulder. Patches of bright light that emerge over the left side of her head and right hand help articulate the firmness of her pose and serious expression.

Figure 7: "Juana M. Mercado," *Minerva* (15 December 1912).

The brightness of Mercado's dress, when compared with the darkness of the flooring and the dimly lit background, charges the photograph with a particular intensity. Mercado is

[311] *Minerva* 15 December 1912.

captured in a past moment, yet seems very much in the present. Perhaps dressed for a performance, Mercado holds the violin as though she is playing it. She places the bows across the violin's strings. Thus, the portrait takes on an air of theatricality in which the subject performs for the viewer. Mercado and her violin—a signifier of Afro-Cubans' appreciation of and skill at performing European classical music—stood in stark contrast to the visual narratives of deviant black social behavior. Confidently facing the camera lens, Mercado's gaze towards the violin seems to affirm this.

Beyond utilizing clothing, a book, or musical instrument as a means to exhibit one's individual progress, a sitter's hair also carried political significance. In each photographic portrait discussed above, the Afro-Cuban woman sitter styled her hair in a manner that resembled the contemporary trends for middle-class and elite Cuban women, regardless of their racial identification. For example, both Juana M. Mercado and Inés Bellini wear their hair parted down the middle and pulled away from their face towards their neck. These simple yet immaculate coifs project their feminine elegance for *Minerva*'s readers.

Racial Womanhood and Understandings of Beauty

Commercial advertisers were cognizant how hair could represent progress and beauty during the early 1900s, and hair-straightening products that targeted Cubans of color elucidate the racialized and gendered dimensions of hair by establishing clear differences between African-descended and Caucasian women's hair. For instance, an advertisement for the hair-straightening cream Pomada "Mora" (Mora Pomade, figure 8) regularly

appeared in *Minerva* between 1910 and 1915. The product sold for forty cents in salons such as the Bazar Inglés (English Bazaar) of Havana, or by agents living throughout the island. The manufacturer declared the pomade's "[s]afe procedure to soften the more rebellious hair, so as to make it straight and silky like the purest Caucasian."[312] As the company claimed that Pomada "Mora" "softened" the "rebellious" locks of Cubans of color, it implied that coarse hair was the antithesis of normative models of beauty and self-presentation. Straightening ones hair thus became a way in which to comply with societal norms. Moreover, it used the image of Caucasians' "straight and silky" hair to

Figure 8: Advertisement for Pomada "Mora," *Minerva* (15 December 1914).

[312] "Procedimiento seguro para suavizar el cabello mas rebelde, al extremo de convertirlo en lacio y sedoso como el del mas puro caucasico."

establish an ideal model of beauty to which Afro-Cubans should aspire.

The Pomada "Mora" advertisements published in *Minerva* frequently included illustrations that featured Cubans of color using the product, thereby making hair-straightening processes a cultural practice. In April 1913, a full-page advertisement depicted a hair stylist applying the pomade to an Afro-Cuban woman's hair. A year later, a separate announcement featured the drawing of dark-skin couples dancing in a ballroom in the latest fashions (dresses, feathered headbands, and fans). Both the female and male dancers had sleek, shiny dark hair. The image was accompanied by the following text: "At a soiree, one can see the advantages of pomade 'Mora.'"[313] However, the advertisement that appeared most frequently in *Minerva* featured "before" and "after" drawings. The "before" image showed a woman with a head of very curly, coarse hair pulled back into a bun. The "after" sketch appeared in the bottom right-hand corner, showing the woman's profile with her straight hair pulled back into the same hairstyle. The text accompanying the sketch read, "In this house there is a diverse and select range of braids and curls for women of color."[314] While the text acknowledged a range of hair types and styles, the visual images emphasized that purchasers of Pomada "Mora" could improve their image by chemically altering their hair texture.

While we do not know if the Afro-Cuban women who appeared in *Minerva* used hair-straightening products (indeed, most women appeared with puffy hair rather than the slick styles portrayed in the advertisements), the Pomada "Mora" advertisements in the

313 *Minerva* 15 December 1914.

314 "Hay en esta casa un variado y selecto surtido de trenzas y bucles para damas de color."

magazine complicate our understandings of Afro-Cuban womanhood and progress in relation to beauty standards. The advertisements suggest that the dominant culture placed women of color outside of the boundaries of "ideal" beauty due to their kinky hair. Moreover, the illustrations implored women with kinky hair to straighten their hair so that it might appear similar to that of their white counterparts who had straight hair. Beauty culture scholar Susannah Walker emphasizes that advertising and consumer culture depicted the body as malleable and consistently in need of enhancement in order to achieve the desired standard of beauty.[315] As signifiers of modernity and progress, advertisements for cosmetic products such as hair pomade implied that coarse hair was an imperfection that needed to be fixed.[316] Certainly, some Cuban women of color straightened their hair by using straightening products. Despite the regular appearance of such ads, the writers of *Minerva* never specifically engaged the politics of hair in written form.

Therefore, sitting for photographic portraits was but one means through which sexuality, race, and gender informed Afro-Cuban discourses of progress. The photographs published within *Minerva* systematically dealt with a range of representational strategies assessed in terms of sexual virtue, elegance, socioeconomic status, and intellectual development. We can also analyze the photographs as a way of representing beauty.

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[315] Susannah Walker, *Style and Status: Selling Beauty to African American Women, 1920-1975* (Louisville: University of Kentucky Press, 2007): 7-8.
[316] Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998): 189; Noliwe M. Rooks, *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women* (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1996): 29.

Visual culture theorist Deborah Willis contends that beauty ideals are mediated by photographers, in addition to the subjects' "fascination with posing for the camera." As she explains, "The notion *to be looked at* is documented and shared within the gaze, the smile, the blush, all interconnected with the subject, the viewer, and the photographer."[317] Because white newspapers and magazines rarely featured photographs of women of color on their pages, a photographer or sitter's desire to project the beauty of a black or mulatto woman also served as a political act: it allowed them to claim Afro-Cuban women as models of physical beauty. Moreover, Afro-Cuban periodicals were one of the few public mediums in which affirming images might have been circulated. Editors were clearly aware of photographic portraits' social value, as they regularly published pictures of black and mulatto women on the covers of their periodicals, including *El Nuevo Criollo*, *Ecos Juveniles, Minerva*, and *Labor Nueva*.[318]

THE LEGAL AND MORAL FAMILY

In 1909, Rafael Serra published a photograph of the Afro-Cuban intellectual and politician Martín Morúa Delgado in his book on racial politics and national progress in Cuba. The senator who proposed what would become the 1910 Morúa Law, which banned racially exclusive political groups such as the PIC, Morúa regularly published essays and gave lectures on the development of Cuba's political system. He also founded

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[317] Deborah Willis, *Posing Beauty: African American Images from the 1890s to the Present* (W.W. Norton and Company, 2009): 18.

[318] In fact, publication editors frequently described female sitters as "culta y belleza" (cultured and beautiful), both within some captions that accompanied photographs and descriptions of women in articles and society pages.

and edited four newspapers: *La Revista Popular*, *La Nueva Era*, *El Pueblo*, and *La República*. In Serra's text, entitled, *Para blancos y negros: ensayos políticos, sociales y económicos* (*For Whites and Blacks: Political, Social, and Economic Essays*), the photographic portrait (figure 9) features Morúa Delgado comfortably seated in a dark chair. He crosses his legs and confidently leans toward his right side. His right elbow rests on the arm of the chair; his left arm rests on his lap. He wears a dark suit, light-colored shirt, and dark bowtie. Morúa's daughters, Arabella and Vestalina, stand slightly behind the chair. Arabella places her right hand on the arm of her father's chair, while Vestalina places her right arm on the back of the chair with her left arm hanging at her side. Both women wear light-colored dresses, and their hair is pulled away from their faces with light colored bows. Arabella wears a simple necklace, while Vestalina wears a brooch and bracelet. The dresses have high collars, are three-quarter length, and have three-quarter-length sleeves. Each of the subjects gazes away from the camera in the same direction. To the left of Morúa is a footrest on which a book is placed. The subjects are seated in a studio or living room, and the floor is covered in an ornate, dark-colored carpet.

What can we ascertain from this photograph in terms of elite Afro-Cuban discourses of progress? Specifically, what does a family portrait reveal about the intersection of race, sexuality, and cultural citizenship among Cubans of color? In comparison to the photographs of the individual female sitters discussed above, Morúa figures prominently as the household patriarch and protector of his young daughters. As revered public figure, his presence mediates their entry into society by affirming their elite status and respectability. Conversely, the exaltation of his daughters' sexual virtue reinforces Morúa's honor before the community of color and the nation. This reciprocal relationship exemplifies the binary nature of racialized gender norms, reinforcing the appropriate boundaries of Afro-Cuban manhood and womanhood through visual representations of the patriarchal family structure.

Figure 9: Rafael Serra's *Para blancos y negros: ensayos políticos, sociales y económicos.*

During the early twentieth century, elite and aspiring-class Cubans of color considered the nuclear family to be a symbol of collective progress. Blacks and mulattoes from legitimate families served as leaders who provided constant instruction to children and the unmarried, laboring poor. Just as a teacher instructed her young students to read and write, elite men and women established the moral compass for the community of color to follow, as they appointed themselves the leaders of the broader population. Cubans of all races valued moral education, restrained sexual behavior, and married unions, yet these concepts took on particular significance for the community of color. Though a variety of family structures existed, elite Afro-Cubans promoted marriage in order to reform a community seeking to eradicate the stigma of historical enslavement. As declared by a reader of *El Nuevo Criollo* in 1905, "Regeneration should be our goal, and the only way one can reach this goal is through the path of strict morality: the legal creation and organization of the family."[319] The article underscored the importance of the legally constituted household by implying that there was only one family model to emulate. The author chastised individuals who engaged in sexual relationships, established households, or raised children without marrying. And when the article urged other readers of *El Nuevo Criollo* to affirm marriage as a part of a collective mission, it articulated specific ways—such as marriage—in which to use sexual morality to uplift the Afro-Cuban community. As demonstrated below, by capturing a married couple and their children in a studio portrait, Afro-Cuban photographic representations of the family contributed to a prominent dialogue regarding the progress of the community of color.

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[319] "A la clase de color," *El Nuevo Criollo* 16 July 1905.

According to this vision of individual progress and collective regeneration, family became one institution through which Afro-Cubans might exercise control over their public image. The laboring poor and the elite blacks and mulattos could demonstrate their ability to adhere to codes of sexual morality. Each person could enrich the virtue of the community of color by marrying and producing legitimate children who would become active, upstanding citizens. Within this context, the seemingly mundane task of posing for and hanging a family portrait on the wall of one's home or publishing a photograph within a book or newspaper reified Afro-Cubans' commitment to the hegemonic understanding of honor and morality. They reasoned that if an Afro-Cuban family could replicate the model of the white nuclear family, they were equally capable of attaining an education and the cultural development necessary for social mobility.

Marriage and the "legitimate" family thus gained new significance for men, women, and children of color during the early decades of the republic. As blacks and mulattos asserted their morality and intellectual and cultural achievements as indications of their ability to progress within a modern society, they emphasized matrimony within social columns published in newspapers and magazines. Afro-Cuban periodicals regularly featured highlights of the weddings of the community's most prominent members. Often, they documented the extravagance of each event, noting the familial connections and the professions of the bride and groom, the names of each attendee—as well as descriptions of their attire—and the gifts given to the young couple.[320] Elite blacks and mulattoes promoted marriage as an institution indispensable to reforming the

[320] For example, see "Ecos de Cienfuegos," *El Nuevo Criollo* 11 February 1905.

larger community. Although these reform-minded individuals likely recognized that poor families might not have possessed the means to marry and host a grand celebration, their obsession with morality and racial uplift frequently pushed the theme of the family to the forefront of Afro-Cuban social discourse.

The 1909 photographic portrait of Morúa Delgado and his daughters reflects this preoccupation with the virtuous household. That the family appears indoors is intentional. Hanson and Pratt explain that the domestic sphere is connected to the "public space of political, economic, and cultural relations and institutions."[321] The photograph's setting of a sitting room presents the family as calm and composed. Moreover, the stance of each subject—with the daughters behind their father—helps project their refinement. By placing the young women behind their father, the photograph implies each daughter's femininity and Morúa Delgado's protection of them. The composition of the image and the arrangement of each subject highlight the dynamics that they will carry from their home into the public sphere—Morúa Delgado as a strong family leader and community member, and his daughters as respectable, educated women.

Changing beliefs and expectations of women's roles within society informed Afro-Cuban discourses of progress in provocative ways. During his lecture given at the Afro-Cuban society *El Progreso* (Progress) in 1889, Morúa Delgado argued that individuals undermined women's potential by assuming that their careers ended upon entering marriage. Rather than undermine or limit the activities of women, he claimed, marriage should present women with the opportunity to prosper. Morúa Delgado asserted

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[321] Hanson and Pratt.

that women should continue to grow throughout their lives in order to best benefit society.[322] His speech paralleled evolving gender norms that identified women's right to pursue an education and equal labor rights, as well as to engage in civic participation on behalf of their investment in family issues. Yet, the photograph of the Morúa family suggests that women did not break completely from the roles established during the colonial era. As Morúa Delgado appears with his daughters standing behind him, the sitters emphasize the father's protection of and dominance over his family. This image demonstrates that gender norms remained in a period of transition during the early twentieth century, as women depended on a patriarchal protector while fighting for women's professional and legal rights.

Figure 10: Portrait of Martín Morúa Delgado, his wife, Elvira Granados de Morúa, and their daughters, Vestalina and Arabella. Published in *El Fígaro* (12 September 1909).

[322] Martin Morúa Delgado, "La mujer y sus derechos: Conferencia," *Minerva* 16 March 1889.

A second photograph of the Morúa Delgado family was published at a time when elite men and women were rallying around the notion of moral education. Featured in the national periodical *El Fígaro* in 1909, the photograph includes Morúa Delgado's wife Elvira Granados de Morúa alongside himself and his daughters (figure 10). Morúa Delgado sits in a chair to the right (viewer's left) of his wife. He wears a black suit, light colored shirt, and tie. His legs are crossed and he holds a book, which he appears to read. His wife also sits. She wears a light colored dress that drapes to the floor and is cinched at her waist with a belt. Her right arm rests on a book that is placed on a small table, and she wears gloves. Elvira looks off into the distance, seemingly engaged in a moment of solitude. Behind Elvira and Martin stand their daughters. Vestalina stands behind her father, her arms placed on his shoulders. She wears glasses and looks down at the book, seeming to read along with her father. Arabella stands behind her mother. She looks toward her father, smiling as she observes him reading. Her left hand is placed on her mother's shoulder; her right hand on a book that lies on the table. All of the women wear light-colored gloves.

Depictions of domestic settings served particular significance since a photographic portrait provided a glimpse—even if staged—into a family's home life. The furniture conveyed opulence and refinement, and, therefore, the economic means to attain luxury items. Similar to the first photograph, the family appears to be in a living room or sitting room. A detailed carpet covers the floor, and a white baseboard frames the edge of the room. A plant is placed on the floor in the back corner. These accoutrements help to create a feeling of domesticity, a controlled space in which both the objects and the

family members are in their proper places. Within this intimate space, Martín Morúa Delgado is seated as the dominant figure, his wife seated alongside him and daughters standing behind.

The members of the Morúa family challenged assumptions of black inferiority while outlining an agenda for racial progress. In addition to the interior setting of the photograph, the inclusion of thick, hardcover books aims to affirm the moral, intellectual, and cultural authority of the Morúa Delgado household. That each subject touches the books illustrates their literacy during a period in which the majority of Cubans were uneducated. Additionally, the large tomes demonstrate the family's engagement with contemporary discourses—Martín Morúa Delgado and his daughters wrote on issues such as economic development, politics, and social relationships during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Morúa was self-educated, able to read and write in multiple languages. During the late nineteenth century, he wrote two novels, *Sofía* and *La Familia Unzúazu* (*The Unzúazu Family*). Both novels dealt with the inhumanity of slavery and its toll on society, addressing the link between Cuban independence and slave emancipation.[323] Vestalina and Arabella were feminists involved with the feminist Club Minerva, and Vestalina contributed to the Afro-Cuban magazine *Minerva*. Central to the themes of each publication were the ideas of democracy, Afro-Cuban contributions to Cuban national development, and the evolution of gender roles.

The second photograph reflects that the young women follow in their father's footsteps as respectable citizens who pursue advancement through education and sexual

323 Martín Morúa Delgado, *La Familia Unzúazu* (La Habana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 1975); *Sofía* (LA Habana: Instituto Cubano del Libro, 1972).

virtue. Similar to the first photographic portrait of the Morúa family, the second photograph peers into their home life, allowing Morúa's gaze and stance to emphasize his patriarchal leadership of a family committed to racial uplift. While Morúa looks away from the camera lens, the gaze of his daughters toward their father affirms his leadership. The young women look at Morúa adoringly, recognizing his role as the model father and husband, intellectual and activist. By emphasizing the strong familial connections between the accomplished community leaders, the gaze of Vestalina and Arabella validates their father's commitment to national and racial progress.

Elvira Morúa de Granados is a part of the family but not fully engaged in the practice of revering Martín or reading the book in his hands. She sits across from Morúa Delgado with her body turned to face him. Her elegant, light-colored clothing covers her entire body, illustrating her sexual virtue. Additionally, her seated position demonstrates her maturity in comparison to her daughters. However, while Vestalina and Arabella focus intently on their father, Elvira does not look at her husband but instead looks past him. Her stance and gaze away from her family underscores her distinct role as the caretaker of the family, perhaps to emphasize that she looks outward in anticipation of potential threats.

The importance of Elvira's depiction as a virtuous mother takes on particular significance when juxtaposed with the reality that most Afro-Cuban mothers did not have the luxury of staying at home with their children. Rather, the majority of black and mulatto women worked outside the home as field laborers or street vendors, or within the homes of whites as cooks or domestic servants. Historian Anne Stavney argues that

within African-American social discourse of the early twentieth century, "black males produced an idealized image of black womanhood in the form of the moral mother" to defend black women against the negative stereotype of black female sexuality.[324] Similarly, Afro-Cuban male intellectuals affirmed the role of women within the domestic sphere as mothers and wives. Elvira's clothing, stance, and gaze affirm her position as a respectable woman who exemplifies morality.

Family portraits rarely appeared within Afro-Cuban publications such as *El Nuevo Criollo*, *Minerva*, or *Labor Nueva* during the early twentieth century. Newspapers and magazines created by Cubans of color seemed to prefer to publish photographs of children or of individual women or men. Texts that discussed the nuclear family examined political factors that ranged from changing gender roles to legal reforms. Many articles also focused on weddings. However, no Afro-Cuban periodical that I consulted featured a photographic portrait of a nuclear family. Of the two Morúa family photographs, one appeared in a book that addressed racial dynamics at the turn-of-the century; the other in the mainstream periodical *El Fígaro*. The absence of family portraits in the Afro-Cuban press elucidates a divergence between understandings of the nuclear family articulated within published articles and the visual narratives of racialized womanhood and manhood that the editors sought to project.

[324] Stavney, 534.

MODERN WOMANHOOD AND PHOTOGRAPHY DURING THE 1920s

By the early 1920s shifting gender sensibilities in Cuba reflected changing international perspectives, as the image of the "modern" woman began to replace the established model of Victorian womanhood that emphasized domesticity and virtuous motherhood. Influenced by U.S. cultural trends, national Cuban magazines such as *Bohemia*, *Social*, and *Carteles* featured illustrations of flapper girls on their covers.[325] Many young, single Cuban women attended movies together without male escorts and were seen smoking cigarettes in public. Some cut their hair into short bobs that resembled current trends and wore clothing that exposed their arms and necklines. Often, these women equated contemporary fashion trends with personal independence. In his study of U.S. economic and cultural influences in Cuba during the First Republic (1902–1933), historian Joshua Nadel explains, "Modern consumption allowed Cubans to redefine themselves and their place in Cuban society as well as Cuba's position relative to other countries in the region and the world."[326] New visions of womanhood did not occur without much anxiety and debate, however. Conservative intellectuals and feminists argued that modern gender norms would erode family values by encouraging women to work and socialize outside of the home.[327] Importantly, though shifting gender ideologies invoked debate among intellectuals and everyday citizens, women's *roles* did not dramatically change, and they continued to remain in the home. Rather, as Nadel highlights through his analysis of photographs from the period, many women merged their consumer interests in fashion,

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[325] Louis A. Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*.
[326] Jeffery H. Nadel, "Processing Modernity: Social and Cultural Adaptation in Eastern Cuba, 1902-1933" (Ph.D. Diss, Universtiy of North Carolina, 2007): 136.
[327] Nadel, "Processing Modernity."

beauty products, and foreign films with traditional roles; they adhered to patriarchal expectations of a woman's place within the home as a wife and mother while conforming to contemporary fashion trends.[328]

This section briefly examines the intersection of gender ideologies and discourses of modernity during the 1920s from the vantage point of an Afro-Cuban photographic portrait. It employs the photograph of the society woman, Amelia González to develop a preliminary analysis of how Afro-Cuban women's self-fashioning evolved during the period. Cuba's economy experienced a brief boom and bust between 1919 and 1921, spurring political, economic, and cultural transformations that reflected the nation's shift from colonial to modern society.[329] Elite and aspiring-class women of color were profoundly affected by this transition: though many women had already worked outside of the home, they began to participate in political and cultural movements as activists and consumers.[330]

Amelia González: Afro-Cuban Society and Modern Womanhood

In December 1922, a writer for the Afro-Cuban social column in the national newspaper *El Mundo* announced an upcoming celebration in honor of Amelia González that appeared alongside a photographic portrait of the young woman. González, president of the Women's Committee of the Afro-Cuban society Unión Fraternal, was a well-known

[328] Nadel, "Processing Modernity."
[329] Francine Masiello, *Between Civilization and Barbarism: Women, Nation and Literacy Culture in Modern Argentina* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992); Susan K. Besse, *Restructuring Patriarchy: The Modernization of Gender Inequality in Brazil, 1914-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).
[330] Helen Safa, *Women, Industrialization, and State Policy in Cuba* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies, 1989).

figure within Havana's community of color. Respected for her "merited and purified virtue," the columnist explained, "today we celebrate, in the heart of our community, the adorable effigy of the kind and nice *señorita* Amelia González […]."[331] The writer noted that *damitas* (young women) of the association gladly organized the "bright and beautiful" event for the "angelic" González. The columnist described that members of the "prestigious and progressive institution" sought to recognize the young leader for her contributions to help unify the community of color.[332]

Figure 11: "Amelia González," *El Mundo* (1 December 1922).

In the *El Mundo* Afro-Cuban society column, the writer praised Amelia González for her efforts to uplift the Unión Fraternal and Havana society of color in the manner of social announcements that appeared throughout the early decades of the twentieth century. In this instance, it is

[331] "Homenjae Merecido," *El Mundo* 1 December 1922.
[332] "Homenjae Merecido."

González's accompanying photograph that is striking. The photograph breaks with the images examined above in both composition and fashion. To begin with, the portrait is cropped close to her body, drawing attention to her face and upper body. Her dark hair is pulled away from her face. González wears a light-colored dress with embroidered detailing that frames the neckline. Though a subtle difference, her dress neckline is lower than that of Esperanza Díaz (examined above), and completely different from the high-collared dresses worn by both Consuelo Serra and Inéz Billini (also featured above). González, therefore, wears a dress that is more revealing in form and is more in line with the fashion trends of the early 1920s.

González's physical stance also sets her photograph apart from the portraits of Afro-Cuban women sitters published during the early 1900s and 1910s. Earlier photographic portraits tended to feature sitters who faced the camera directly or at a ninety-degree angle to reveal the subject's profile. González, however, sits at a three-quarter angle with her face turned towards the camera, but gazing away from the viewer. Her position creates a sense of immediacy; she seems to be caught in motion, turning toward the viewer rather than posing.

By closely cropping the image to frame González's face and upper body, the photographer brings attention to her character rather than the props or background. There is a solid-colored backdrop instead of individual items that were previously used to create a domestic scene. Props—such as a book or musical instrument that demonstrate her intellectual or cultural attainments are also not included. Her photograph thus presents an

uncomplicated image of her beauty and self that de-emphasizes the subject's connection to the domestic sphere.

A comparison of the *El Mundo* social announcement and accompanying photographic portrait raises several key points for considering how Afro-Cuban women's self-fashioning evolved in relation to ideas of modern womanhood and patriarchal discourses of racial progress. First, the column's author employed gendered language to exalt González as a social leader and emphasized her femininity and respectability. He described her as "nice," "kind," and of "purified virtue."[333] Second, the writer elucidated González's commitment to community uplift through her work as a leader of the "progressive" Afro-Cuban society Unión Fraternal. Finally, the author noted no contradiction between the text and visual image. Therefore, the creation of modern Afro-Cuban womanhood through fashion and photographic representations became integrated into patriarchal discourses of racial progress that continued to emphasize binary social roles for men and women.

[333] "Homenjae Merecido."

Figure 5: "Dámas de Atenas/Grupo de Bellezas," *Revista Atenas* (1931).

González's photograph resembled other photographic portraits that appeared within the national and Afro-Cuban press beginning in the 1920s. In a survey of magazines and newspapers published between 1904 and 1953, I found similar pictures of both white and Afro-Cuban women in 1925 issues of the national publication *Carteles*. During the 1930s, the Club Atenas organization magazine (shown above) featured black-and-white photographs of its women associates on a double-page spread with the heading "Damas de Atenas" ("Atenas Ladies"). Some women smiled, and each subject's gaze varied: some women look away from the camera, others looked toward the camera without making direct eye contact, and a few looked directly into the camera. The community newspaper *Noticias de Hoy* featured photographs of society members and

even national and international celebrities that resembled the composition of the González photograph. Issues of the Afro-Cuban periodicals *Nuevos Rumbos* and *Amanecer* included similarly cropped photographs of its society women, men, and children. Given the lengthy period of time during which the photographs continued to appear, I hypothesize that the González photograph represents a new style of composition within photographic portraits of individual sitters beginning in the early 1920s.

CONCLUSION

It is not surprising that photographic portraits became popular among elite Cubans of color during the early years of the republic. Technological innovations made the medium more accessible, and the mass-production and circulation of consumer goods—including magazines and newspapers—created new opportunities for blacks and mulattoes to fashion images of blackness and womanhood. Drawing upon the understanding of progress, photographic representations of Afro-Cuban women created a visual image of moral, intellectual, and cultural development.

Afro-Cuban photographic portraiture embraced racial regeneration through the utilization of visual markers—clothing, domestic settings, books, and musical instruments demonstrated the progress of its subjects. Fashion connected the Afro-Cuban female sitters to larger national and global cultural trends, including ideas about leisure and mass consumption, production, and the construction of modern womanhood. However, race complicated the meaning of dress, gloves, or hairstyle; a sitter's attire and hairstyle served to contradict stereotypical representations of Afro-Cuban women as

immoral and uncivilized. When featured in Afro-Cuban publications, photographic images of black and mulatto women illustrated that, contrary to contemporary magazines and newspapers that rarely published portraits of women of color women and their families, a community of respectable and accomplished women of color existed. Additionally, an object such as a book or violin reflected the cultural refinement of a woman of color, which Afro-Cuban elites viewed as an important step in their move away from a legacy of slavery towards a modern identity.

The family took on particular significance as elite Cubans of color sought to regenerate a community in which they felt had been still suffering the denigration inherited from slavery. Family portraits, in particular, affirmed men and women's roles within the domestic sphere. The portraits of Martín Morúa Delgado and his family highlight that men appeared as the patriarchal head that provided protection and guidance for their wives and children. Additionally, the positions of Morúa's wife Elvira served to underscore her role as the household's protector and moral leader. His unmarried daughters Arabella and Vestalina affirmed their respectability through their connection to their father. By incorporating books into the photograph, individuals of the Morúa Delgado family demonstrated their commitment to racial progress through education. The photographs thus illustrated the existence of married households within the Afro-Cuban community and projected this model for other blacks and mulattoes to emulate.

Afro-Cuban photographic portraits attempted to recast the dominant visual narrative by challenging negative conceptions of blackness, redefining their public image along the lines of European, elite behaviors. Such photographic images created an

alternative narrative of Afro-Cuban female identity. They provided insight into the private lives of women of color—illustrating their femininity and moral leadership before the nation and the community of color. Yet, the success of this alternative narrative is debatable. On one hand, racist stereotypes about black women and the black family did not disappear. On the other hand, many prominent families did become established members of their communities. Visual depictions of the subjects' education and intellectual development suggested an avenue for pursuing mobility within professional and political institutions. No doubt, their ability to conform to dominant ideas of morality, culture, and citizenship helped them navigate these roads.

The changing composition and fashion worn within published photographs—as demonstrated by the portrait of Amelia González—highlights the ways in which understandings of modern womanhood informed discourses of racial progress. González's image also hints at changes that were beginning to emerge during the 1920s. Shifting economic, political, and cultural dynamics of the period would lead to discontent among Cuba's popular classes. The republic had existed for decades without establishing full sovereignty—including political and financial independence from U.S. and Spanish economic control—and continued to experience government corruption that privileged the interests of elites. Afro-Cubans continued to challenge racial discrimination within this context. The laboring poor gained political influence, mobilizing within unions and at national congresses as they protested capitalist exploitation. Feminists also hosted national congresses, during which they demanded suffrage and advocated for expanded labor opportunities and on behalf of children. By the late 1920s, a younger generation of

Afro-Cubans would begin to assert a critique of capitalist exploitation that, in many ways, supplanted respectability discourses. Chapter 4 will examine the ways in which understandings of Afro-Cuban womanhood evolved in relation to these transformations within the national public sphere.

CHAPTER FOUR

La Mujer Negra (The Black Woman): The Transformation of Afro-Cuban Women's Political and Social Thought during the 1930s

In the 1920s, Cuba's political system underwent a series of transformations that began to shift social dynamics and altered how women of color articulated race, womanhood, and citizenship. Gerardo Machado y Morales began his presidency (1925–1933) as the first Liberal Party candidate elected since José Miguel Gómez (1909–1913). Machado promised to revive the nation's economy and increase employment opportunities. The labor movement expanded in size and influence, as trade unions consolidated to form a single national organization—the Confederación Nacional de Obreros Cubanos (National Confederation of Cuban Workers, or CNOC). The CNOC worked to build a broad base of support that included youth, blacks, and women. In addition, CNOC leaders established their commitment to ending racial discrimination in labor as a part of their platform for the first time. Feminist leaders also began emphasizing the struggles of women from the laboring classes, notably during events that included the Second National Women's Congress in 1925, when Afro-Cuban tobacco union head Inocencia Valdés spoke on behalf of women working in the tobacco industry. The shift of both labor and feminist leaders to include previously excluded social groups reflected the development of a broad-based coalition of social groups that emerged in protest of government corruption and U.S. Imperialism in Cuba.

This chapter examines the context in which Afro-Cuban women, in addition to other workers, activists, and intellectuals, theorized national development from the standpoint of the black female experience. It argues that the transformations in Cuban

politics paralleled the rise of discussions that examined the experiences of *la mujer negra* (the black woman). This history, as well as the broader history of Afro-Cuban women's activist and intellectual activities during the 1920s and 1930s, has eluded scholars. Studies of Cuban nation formation between the 1925 presidential inauguration of Machado and the publication of the 1940 Constitution identify a tumultuous political period in which marginalized social groups demanded legal reform. Historian Robert Whitney, for example, looks at the collapse of Cuba's oligarchic rule and mobilization of the middle and working classes for political reorganization between 1920 and 1940.[334] Scholars who study race highlight the involvement of numerous prominent Afro-Cuban leaders in labor and communist movements of the period, and historical analyses of the Cuban women's movement note that bourgeois feminists incorporated working-class women into their organizations as they pursued suffrage.[335] While these works have convincingly demonstrated that Cubans of various backgrounds sought to regenerate the nation's political system, this literature has yet to fully explore how Afro-Cuban women's activism—particularly that of black and mulatto feminists and communists—across political movements contributed to the development of labor, racial, and gender movements. An examination of Afro-Cuban women's theorizing as members of elite political parties, Afro-Cuban organizations, women's groups and communist-led labor unions demonstrates that these associations engaged in a cross-organizational movement

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[334] Robert Whitney, *State and Revolution in Cuba: Mass Mobilization and Political Change, 1920-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

[335] Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Frank Guridy, "Racial Knowledge in Cuba: The Production of a Social Fact, 1912-1944" (Ph.D. diss, University of Michigan, 2002); Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*; Julio Cesar Gonzalez Pages.

regarding citizenship. In the process, women of color helped conceptualize workers' rights, as well as strategies for racial and gender equality. Their concerns would be institutionalized with the ratification of Cuba's 1940 Constitution.

In this chapter, I analyze the ways in which workers, activists, and politicians examined the experiences of black women as they critiqued economic exploitation, social discrimination, and the failures of Cuba's political system. Drawing on public political discourse such as speeches, published articles, and organizational records, this chapter illustrates that these discussions reflected a shift in the terminology Cubans of color used to articulate Afro-Cuban womanhood. During the early decades of the twentieth century, Afro-Cubans referred to "women of color" or "women of the colored race," or they compared the experiences and perceived attributes of black, mulatto, and *mestizo* women when they examined social roles and the lives of women of African descent. By 1925, both whites and Afro-Cubans referenced "the black woman" in particular within their political speeches, publications, and conference proceedings. I argue that this discursive shift occurred in part because of the mobilization of the popular classes that began during the 1920s. The incorporation of popular-class concerns into activist agendas for national reform led to the acknowledgement of worker oppression by social leaders and elite politicians. Many Cubans observed that being black or female further aggravated class oppression, and they argued that black women suffered a "triple discrimination" due to Afro-Cuban women's race, class, and gender. Cuban women of color contributed to examinations of black women's triple oppression by underscoring the concerns of black

women workers and black mothers. In doing so, they challenged class inequality, racial ideologies, and the established patriarchal social order.

Evolving class dynamics that took place during the 1920s and 1930s informed how activists and intellectuals conceptualized the oppression of black women. During this period, many labor leaders began to frame their rights in relation to Marxist critique of capitalism, which emphasized the exploitative nature capitalist system in Cuba. They argued that capitalism also relied on the division of the proletariat into gendered and racial subdivisions of labor, thereby creating women's work that was distinguished from men's work and discriminating against Cubans of color. Feminists and communist activists utilized this rhetoric to recruit women and Cubans of color into their organizations. As these groups appealed to state leaders for improved working conditions, wages, and benefits, they developed a new political consciousness through which they asserted that the government was responsible for protecting the interests of the laboring classes in addition to elites.

Recognizing that not all of the individuals cited in this chapter identified as communists or joined the labor movement, I underscore that the evolved class perspective through which Cubans focused on the rights and the working conditions of the laboring classes affected conceptions of citizenship and government responsibility that took place within a variety of organizations. For example, Afro-Cuban club members protested racial discrimination within employment and discussed the limited opportunities for economic mobility afforded to poor blacks and mulattoes. Many Afro-Cuban leaders partnered with or even joined the CNOC to demand the implementation of

anti-racial discrimination laws. Additionally, white elite and middle-class feminists also began to protest the conditions of working women, and they incorporated working women into their organizations in order to gain support in demanding suffrage.

In thinking about class politics within the feminist movement, as well as feminist activism on behalf of laboring women's rights, this chapter draws from historian K. Lynn Stoner's analysis of the Cuban women's movement. Stoner observes that Cuba's feminist leadership consisted primarily of elite and middle-class white women during the republican era. Indeed, white women served as the founders of the major organizations, such as the Federación Nacional de Asociaciones Femeninas de Cuba (National Federation of Cuban Women's Associations), and edited feminist publications that included *Aspiraciones*. Stoner notes that white feminists considered destitute and laboring women as "victims who needed help, not power."[336] In the early 1920s, elite feminists formed aid organizations and advocated for legal reforms that would benefit poor mothers, however, they did not invite working women to participate in or become members of their organizations. This perspective would begin to change in the late 1920s, as the political and economic turmoil of the period led feminists to form alliances with poor women and incorporate their issues into their agendas. One way to track this development is by looking at the evolution of the three National Women's Congresses. The first Congress, held in Havana in 1923, consisted primarily of white women feminist attendees. In 1925, two Afro-Cuban women spoke at the Second Congress: Doctor María Julia de Lara addressed health issues among Cuban women; and Inocencia Valdés spoke

[336] Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*, 171.

on behalf of poor women laborers, regardless of race. The Third National Women's Congress of 1939 included workers and women of color from across the island as organizing committee members and attendees. The transforming class and racial demographics of women associated with the National Women's Congresses mirrored the evolution of political organizing and representation that took place on a national scale.

Because this chapter examines the perspectives of elite and aspiring-class Afro-Cuban women, many of whom did not identify as feminists, it calls for an understanding of the women's movement that builds upon and departs from previous scholarship. I conceptualize the women's movement broadly to include the range of political groups and leaders that fought on behalf of women's expanded rights within the political sphere. This heterogeneous movement included individuals of varying class, racial, and regional identifications, as well as political and religious backgrounds. I focus on the role of blacks and mulattoes within the women's movement to highlight the overlap between social movements for reform that emerged and changed during the period. Moreover, an analysis of Afro-Cuban women's involvement in this movement provides for a more complete study of how women of color articulated their identities. It is important to note, however, that Afro-Cuban women did not always identify themselves as "black women" within public political discourse. Often, they simply identified as women when writing for Afro-Cuban publications and sought to incorporate the perspectives of mothers and children into their agendas for racial reform. When addressing feminist groups, they brought their perspectives as workers or blacks, thereby challenging the exclusivity of the movement and encouraging white elite women to recognize the concerns for black

families and the laboring poor. There were, additionally, cases in which Cuban women of color identified as "black women" or "black mothers." I argue that this varied identification reflected a particular perspective through which black women underscored that they encountered multiple forms of oppression—racial, class-based, and gender—which created for them a unique social experience, known as the black female experience.

Like the women who articulated patriarchal understandings of racial progress during the early years of the republic, the Afro-Cuban women who theorized black womanhood were the products of evolving racial and gender ideologies embedded within national discourses during this period. Popular mobilization against elite sociopolitical rule and U.S. imperialism compelled Cubans to acknowledge how political corruption and economic exploitation affected labor reform, citizenship, and social equality, matters that disproportionately affected black women. Within this context, Afro-Cuban women's social and political thought shifted from gendered perspectives that underscored their respectability to analyses that highlighted the material inequalities that maintained black women's socioeconomic marginalization. As such, they employed ideas of citizenship and social equality to construct an identity that elucidated their particular concerns and experiences. The issues raised by women of color were manifested prominently at the 1939 Third National Women's Congress, during which black women became influential leaders within the women's movement under the banner of solidarity and political reform. An examination of their social and political thought reveals the transformation in nationalist ideologies, as well as the women's movement and Afro-Cuban community.

POPULAR MOBILIZATION AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF RACIAL AND GENDER IDEOLOGIES

In 1924, Liberal Party presidential candidate Gerardo Machado y Morales presented a political "Platform of Regeneration" that entailed the nation's revival. He promised to end government corruption, ensure economic development, and bolster the rights of workers, blacks, and women.[337] During Machado's first term (1925–1928) he was able to institute reforms that enhanced his popularity. His public works programs and expansion of the educational system helped to strengthen Cuba's national infrastructure and create new jobs. He supported the community of color by promoting Afro-Cubans to government positions and financially supporting black societies. During a speech at the 1925 Second National Women's Congress, Machado even won the support of many feminist activists when he agreed to support the idea of women's suffrage. By 1926, political elites of the Conservative, Popular, and Liberal parties felt so strongly about his accomplishments that they declared their unified support for Machado.[338]

Despite Machado's successes, he incited protests across the island when—feeling confident in his support from political elites and the U.S. embassy—he revoked his pledge to not run for reelection and amended the Constitution of the Republic so that he could serve until 1934. His second administration (1928–1933) was markedly different. Machado became isolated from many party leaders who considered his decision to serve a second term an indefensible violation of his earlier promise. The previously established party consensus split, resulting in the fracturing of the political elite. In 1929, the

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[337] Perez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 258; Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*, 76.
[338] Guridy, "Racial Knowledge in Cuba," 169-188; Whitney, *State and Revolution in Cuba*, 55.

international financial market crash created additional challenges for Machado; it left Cuba's economy in ruins and destroyed the wages and living conditions of hundreds of thousands of individuals. Additionally, the economic crisis became political when the popular classes and middle-class youth began mobilizing to challenge Machado and the established oligarchic rule. Machado actively, and often brutally, sought to represses his critics by targeting the recently formed Communist Party and the CNOC, as well as other threatening political factions. Law enforcement officials arrested and imprisoned numerous students, field laborers, workers, and intellectuals without trial. Others died violently when attacked by the police during street protests.[339]

During this period of economic and political crisis, oppositional leaders worked to bring unity to Cuban popular politics: black and feminist organizations teamed with labor unions, student activists, and the Communist Party to demand the end of government corruption and the restoration of financial stability. The anti-Machado movement reached its climax in August 1933 when a general strike initiated in support of protesting bus drivers and police developed into a "revolutionary offensive."[340] On August 7, a conflict between marchers and the Havana police became violent, leaving numerous individuals injured or dead. The U.S. government quickly intervened and instructed Machado to

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[339] Louis A. Pérez, Cuba Under the Platt Amendment (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986); Lionel Soto, *La revolución del 33* 3 vols. (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1977); Luis E. Aguilar, Cuba 1933: Prologue to Revolution (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972); José Tabares del Real, *La revolucion del 30: Sus dos últimos años* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1973); Samuel Farber, *Revolution and Reaction in Cuba: From Machado to Castro, 1933-1960* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1976); Fabio Grobart, "El movimiento obrero cubano entre 1925 a 1933," in *Pensamineto Critico*; Carleton Beals, *The Crime of Cuba* (Philadelphia: Lippincott Company, 1933); Fernando Martínez Heredia, *La Revolución Cubana del 30, Ensayos* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2007); Whitney, *State and Revolution in Cuba*.

[340] Perez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 258.

resign in order to restore peace. Though initially defiant, Machado finally ceded the presidency on August 12. Carlos Manuel de Céspedes became Cuba's new president. Unfortunately, this "frustrated revolution" did not end Cubans' struggles for reform; corruption, street violence, and economic stagnation persisted.[341] Following the Revolution, the Provisional Revolutionary Government (established in September 1933) came to power as a result of a military uprising among lower-ranking soldiers, supported by the civilian anti-government opposition, that would later become known as the "Sergeants' Revolt." The new government sought to create a "new Cuba" in favor of social equality and economic independence from the United States. Led by Ramón Grau San Martín, the government granted women the right to vote, implemented workers' protection laws that included an eight-hour workday, and dissolved the political parties that existed under the *machadato* (Machado presidency). It also abrogated the 1901 Platt Amendment, which had granted the United States rights in Cuban affairs and granted U.S. claims to economic and military territories.[342]

The Provisional Government's reign was brief, lasting just five months. In January 1934, the Provisional Government was overthrown by a right-wing coalition led by Army Sergeant Fulgencio Batista. Supported by the U.S. State Department, Unión Nacionalista (Nationalist Union) party leader Carlos Mendieta became Cuba's president; Batista maintained his political authority as the Cuban army leader throughout the

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[341] Louis A. Pérez argues that the military coup occurred out of fear of another United States intervention. See *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 200.
[342] Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*, 65, 167-184; Perez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 310.

1930s.[343] In many ways, the elite and middle classes, as well as the U.S. government, regained control with the restoration of social stability and the electorate. However, Cuba's political system had been fundamentally altered. The popular class—which included urban and rural workers, peasants, lower-middle-class students, and government employees—was now a part of the political system and needed to be acknowledged as such.[344] Elite political groups formed loose alliances with the reorganized Communist Party. By the late 1930s, Batista embraced a populist style of leadership through which he aligned himself with *los humildes* (the humble ones).[345] These actions reinvigorated the political climate and created new opportunities for blacks, women, and workers to assert their vision of a transformed nation in which they possessed expanded citizenship rights.[346]

The "Triple Discrimination" Confronted by Black Women

As the 1910s came to a close, Cuban women of color faced complex issues surrounding social mobility and equality as a result of racial, class, and gender oppression. Matters pertaining to employment and economic stability, education, and political rights became particularly manifest as communists, women activists, and race reformists developed a more critical analysis of the structural inequalities that undermined citizenship rights and social equality for the majority of the population. Additionally, the expansion of an Afro-

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[343] Scholars argue that Batista ruled behind the scenes by using "puppet presidents" from 1934 up until his own presidency (1940-44).
[344] Here, I draw from Robert Whitney's definition of the popular classes. See, *State and Revolution in Cuba*, 4.
[345] Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 211.
[346] Frank Guridy. "War on the Negro': Race and the Revolution of 1933," *Cuban Studies* 40 (2009): 49-73.

Cuban professional class created new expectations—and problems—for black and mulatto women. Historian Alejandro de la Fuente explains that many Cubans of color rose to "middle-class" status from "modest origins" by the 1920s. As Afro-Cubans and women took advantage of Cuba's expanding education system between 1902 and 1919, educated women of color potentially held new employment opportunities. However, racial discrimination left many frustrated; numerous educated Afro-Cuban women complained of their inability to locate positions in the professions for which they had trained and instead were forced to accept low-paying, "unworthy jobs" as industrial or domestic workers.

Thus, by the 1920s, it became clear that Afro-Cubans' strategies for racial improvement, which many Cubans of color emphasized during the early years of the republic, were not enough to protect them from discrimination. Despite declaring their cultural superiority over poor blacks and mulattoes, elite and aspiring-class Cubans of color confronted prejudice in social spaces that included restaurants and hotels, as well as housing. They faced exclusion within parks where racial segregation was the established practice; violating these practices resulted in violence on several occasions.[347] In 1928, Afro-Cuban journalist Gustavo Urrutia lamented that "decent" families were unable to lease units in "skyscrapers" and modern apartment buildings of Havana.[348] Cubans of color, who possessed the financial means to socialize and live in the most fashionable establishments and neighborhoods, frequently found themselves restricted from entry.

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[347] Guridy, "'War on the Negro'"; Guridy, "Racial Knowledge in Cuba"; de la Fuente, *A Nation For All*.
[348] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 160.

Elite and aspiring-class Afro-Cubans were not alone in their struggle with racial discrimination during the period. Indeed, poor Cubans of color faced an additional set of challenges due to their socioeconomic status. Blacks' control of farmland—as both renters and owners—decreased 50 percent between 1899 and 1931 as foreign investors took over the sugar industry.[349] Afro-Cubans who worked in the factories and agricultural sectors were usually excluded from the most skilled positions and restricted to wage labor. Blacks were underrepresented as laborers within the expanding civil service, transportation, and telephone industries. The decline of Cuba's economy during the late 1920s exacerbated these circumstances, as falling wages and rising unemployment left Cubans of color, and Cubans in general, in a precarious financial situation. The quality of housing deteriorated and continued to do so into the 1930s. High unemployment often caused women of color to support themselves and their families by working in the informal sector as laundresses, domestic servants, street vendors, and prostitutes.

Afro-Cuban women activists joined the mainstream women's movement to fight against these deteriorating conditions created by racial discrimination and class exploitation, and they incorporated a gendered analysis of social struggle that highlighted the concerns of working mothers and children. As Stoner explains, elite and middle-class feminists began to assert their political authority within the realm of education and social welfare during the 1930s. They helped establish literacy and school lunch programs, worked to redefine the penitentiary system on behalf of women and juvenile prisoners, and advocated for women's political empowerment. They also collaborated with laboring

[349] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 106.

women to support a maternity code for working mothers, propose laws against sexual harassment, and demand equal pay for equal work among women and men. Therefore, Cuban women of color worked within the women's movement to fight against issues that included poverty, low levels of education, and women's suffrage.[350]

Political Debates on Race, Gender, and Citizenship

Within this context of political and economic instability and transformation, conceptions of a black woman's experience elucidate evolving racial, class, and gender ideologies between 1925 and 1939. In addition, this period illuminates that Cubans held myriad opinions about the impact of capitalism on Cuban politics. Prominent intellectual and politician Juan Marinello may have separately addressed race and gender discrimination within the workplace when he wrote "La Cuestión Racial en el Trabajo, la Inmigración y la Cultura" ("The Racial Question in Work, Immigration, and Culture") in 1939, but his campaign for proletarian labor rights established a framework for understanding the range of ways that black women faced economic and social marginalization as workers. Marinello linked state redevelopment to labor reform and demanded that the government recognize the rights of workers, including protecting women workers and eliminating discrimination against blacks.[351] "La Cuestión Racial" employed the language of capitalist exploitation used in a similar manner by the CNOC, and Partido Comunista de Cuba (Cuban Communist Party, or PCC), two national organizations that, by the late

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[350] Stoner, *From the House to the Streets,* 173.

[351] Juan Marinello, "La Cuestión Racial en el Trabajo, la Inmigración y la Cultura," (Criterios de Union Revolucionaria, 10 March 1939).

1920s, had begun to devote full attention to the "black question," in addition to women, youth, and poor workers. Indeed, the CNOC rejected all forms of racial discrimination and prohibited the entry of any union that sustained such practices into the organization. Both the CNOC and PCC also began to recruit blacks as party members and leaders.[352] Thus, Marinello's analysis of race and discrimination reflected broader struggles that took place among labor leaders in which individuals committed themselves to a wider constituency that included women and Cubans of color.

Just as Marinello condemned the maintenance of racial discrimination through capitalist exploitation, feminist leaders such as the white Santa Clara activist Ofelia Domínguez Navarro appropriated the very notion that blacks—in particular black women—suffered most within a capitalist society. Domínguez acknowledged the "triple aggression" confronted by black women, specifying that, "as a woman, as a worker, as a black…the weight of capitalist exploitation" affected them in a particular manner that differed from other Cubans.[353] In other words, black women confronted racial, gender, *and* class oppression. In a December 1938 paper presented at the Spanish society El Pilar, Domínguez examined the origins of gender discrimination through Marxist analysis of the family and private property. She protested the uneven relationship that had developed between men and women "during long centuries," a period in which "woman was converted into a thing, without personality, nor her own volition."[354] This cycle of social

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[352]Pedro Serviat, "La Discriminacion Racial en Cuba, Su Origen, Desarrollo y Terminacion Definitiva," *Islas* (66): 3-22; *A Nation for All*, 191.
[353] Ofelia Domínguez Navarro, "La mujer y los prejuicios raciales." 3/28.1/1—29 Archivo del Instituto de Historia de Cuba (Hereafter referred to as AIH).
[354] Domínguez Navarro, "La mujer y los prejuicios raciales."

behavior relegated most women to the status of "domestic slave." Yet as Domínguez criticized women's restricted roles within Cuban society, she emphasized that "the condition of a woman" as a member of "a discriminated race" reflected the "enormous inequality of racial and sexual pretext within a democractic system."[355] In a separate essay, Domínguez suggested that race persisted as a significant obstacle because, "In comparing whites and blacks, the ruling classes have created enormous economic obstacles that are difficult or impossible [for Cubans of color] to overcome."[356] She asserted that, despite the "pretended equality" that many Cubans espoused, the black race "remain[ed] constitutionally separated, isolated from the integral development of our society."[357] Linking racial oppression to gender discrimination, she explained, "We cannot deny that our black [female] companion suffers the most iniquitous of preteritions."[358]

Economic marginalization certainly affected black women, and many politicians and intellectuals clearly understood this. However, given the ways in which class-based, gendered, and racialized concepts informed notions of Cuban identity and citizenship in this period, most discussions of the black female experience stressed capitalism's impact on women of color as workers rather than consider their marginalization as blacks among white women or as women within the community of color. During the late 1920s and 1930s, women's labor and feminist organizations began to appeal to women of color to join the ranks of the women's movement: Cuban feminists' campaign for suffrage was

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[355] Domínguez Navarro, "La mujer y los prejuicios raciales."
[356] Domínguez Navarro, "La mujer y los prejuicios raciales."
[357] Ofelia Domínguez Navarro, "La mujer y la discriminación racial." 3/28.1/30—32 AIH.
[358] Domínguez Navarro, "La mujer y la discriminación racial."

precarious, and they believed black women could play a decisive role in supporting their movement for legal reform. For example, leaders of the radical feminist organization Alianza Nacional Feminista (National Feminist Alliance, or ANF) recruited black women as they sought to mobilize women laborers in support of suffrage rights. Headed by Domínguez, the call of the ANF in 1928 elucidates this strategy: "Companions of all races, of all social classes, you, white as Martí and Aragamonte, you, black as Moncada and Maceo…What do we desire? That the right to suffrage is conceded to us plainly and without restrictions."[359] Rather than discuss gender discrimination by employing the rhetoric of a universal Cuban woman's experience, ANF leaders invoked a nuanced understanding of gender formation that acknowledged racial and class divisions. This broad conceptualization of membership helped the ANF to bring black women—a large percentage of whom worked as tobacco stemmers during the period—into the mainstream feminist movement.[360] After protesting political administrations for more than three decades, women gained the right to vote and hold political office with the ratification of the 1934 Constitution. Subsequently, new political and professional and educational gains—many of which incorporated a working-class political agenda that appealed to women of color by acknowledging racial distinctions—created a new gender consciousness.

During this period, many Cubans believed that capitalist greed undermined national politics as a whole, yet radical activists also posited that economic exploitation

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[359] González-Pagés, *En busca de un espacio*, 86.

[360] Led by Afro-Cuban female labor leaders Eudosia Lara and Inocencia Valdés, women's tobacco stemmers unions helped to mobilize thousands of black women who demanded higher wages, maternity regulations, and improved working conditions. See, González Pagés, *En busca de un espacio*, 86.

had produced opportunities for a highly class-based, racialized, and gendered struggle against the wealthy. They argued that capitalist domination of factories, tobacco fields, and sugar plantations had the potential to serve as figurative and literal fronts where Cubans could earn the protection of the state and their recognition within the national culture. For Marinello and other Cubans, exploitation was little more than a fixed competition in which marginalized groups would inevitably lose. The activists believed it was improbable that the laboring poor would ever gain financial stability due to meager wages and the poor conditions under which they worked, as well as the extreme distinctions in wealth between business owners and factory and agricultural employees. However, Domínguez saw things differently: She viewed the end of black women's marginalization as a necessary step in claiming legal rights, as an inevitable by-product of national development, and as a fulfillment of the nineteenth century independence movement for full equality.

At the same time, Cubans of color not only presented varying perspectives on issues of race, gender, and economic exploitation that at times supported communist principles, but also emphasized blacks' right to self-determination. For example, Afro-Cuban labor leader Serafín Portuondo shared Marinellos's belief that capitalist exploitation maintained racial discrimination and undermined social equality. Portuondo insisted that "the particular oppression that blacks suffer becomes more cruel due to their economic and political helplessness created by a semi-monopoly and of a semi-colonial republic; that [oppression] has not resolved this situation differently for Cuba's black

population."[361] Portuondo thus argued that economic disparities and a lack of political influence exacerbated the material inequities that blacks confronted as a result of their race. Afro-Cuban journalist Gustavo Urrutia also emphasized black oppression as he examined racial politics in Cuba within his weekly column "Ideales de una Raza" ("Ideals of a Race," see below), yet he suggested that Cubans of color might be able to "create a position of economic independence" by creating strong businesses.[362] For Urrutia, it was important that "the black race" organize itself "as a producer of riches in order to value itself and to contribute to Cuban progress."[363]

Urrutia put forth ideas in his column "Ideales de una Raza" that echoed sentiments shared by many elite and aspiring-class Afro-Cuban women living during the 1920s and 1930s. They advocated for the full integration of black men and women into society within educational, economic, and political institutions. Urrutia became one of the major public figures to support dialogues regarding the black woman's experience. While "Ideales" covered a variety of international, national, and local issues, column space was primarily reserved for the concerns of Havana's aspiring-class community of color. Urrutia created "Ideales" to articulate the *raza de color* (the colored race) as a collective voice committed to intellectual and economic advancement. Published in the major national newspaper published out of Havana *Diario de la Marina*, the column reached a wide range of readers living throughout the island and in the United States.[364] "Ideales"

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[361] Serafin Portuondo, "Sobre el problema negro," *El Comunista* November 1939.
[362] Gustavo Urrutia, "Una actitud nueva," *Diario de la Marina* 15 December 1929.
[363] "Una actitud nueva."
[364] Alejandra Bronfman, *Measures of Equality: Social Science, Citizenship, and Race in Cuba, 1902-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). Also see, Tomás Fernandez Robaina, *El negro en*

appeared in most Sunday issues of *Diario de la Marina* from 1928 to 1933. From the beginning, Urrutia rejected the nationalist rhetoric of a single, Cuban race in order to consider the distinct experiences of two racial groups—whites and the colored race. Moreover, he emphasized Afro-Cuban participation within social and economic institutions in addition to the political sphere.[365] By focusing on themes that included race, class, and gender discrimination, Afro-Cuban contributions to the arts and literature, and the development of African-American institutions for social advancement, Urrutia and numerous "Ideales" contributors—including Afro-Cuban women Cloris Tejo, Calixta Hernández de Cervantes, and Consuelo Serra—created a modern black discourse that presented to white readers the issues that were relevant to the community of color. Moreover, "Ideales" expanded black identity formations within the context of evolving discussions of Cuban national identity. Following the column's final installment in 1933, Urrutia continued to write for *Diario de la Marina* in his regular editorial "Armonías" ("Unity").

Urrutia's focus on racial issues reflected one of many evolved intellectual traditions that emerged in conjunction with discussions of the distinct black female experience during this period.[366] As historians have shown, the focus on environmental factors that created disparate social conditions occurred within the realm of science, as well. During the late 1920s, Cuban scientists moved away from debates on the inherent

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Cuba, 1902–1958: apuntes para la historia de la lucha contra la disriminacion racial (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1990); Guridy, "Racial Knowledge in Cuba."

[365] Bronfman notes that Urrutia's construction of race constituted one of many ideologies within black Cuban thought. See *Measures of Equality*.

[366] Interestingly, Urrutia identified the struggle for racial equality and women's rights as "Distinct problems that have identical solutions." See "Las mujeres y los negros," *Diario de la Marina* 15 March 1933.

racial inferiority of blacks to emphasize how material conditions, particularly the low wages or cases of unemployment that led to poverty, affected mortality and the moral and cultural breakdown of Afro-Cuban communities. For example, Dr. Juan Guiteras' study of tuberculosis supported a nationalist agenda in which he argued against studies created by U.S. and European scientists who claimed that whites degenerated in the tropics. Guiteras challenged the assumption that whites—in particular, Cuban whites—faced deteriorated health and morality when living in a humid climate. He determined that diseases such as tuberculosis did not occur "due to racial inferiority or degeneration but were caused by poor social conditions."[367] Tuberculosis affected Cubans of color disproportionately: Though comprising only 27.2 percent of the island's population, blacks and mulattoes accounted for 40 percent of all tuberculosis-related deaths between 1904 and 1928.[368] It quickly became considered a "social disease" in which public officials focused on the hygiene and living conditions of poor women and children. In 1929, Dr. Jose A. Taboadela proposed to the readers of *Diario de la Marina*, "To prevent tuberculosis and its diffusion it is necessary to prevent poverty."[369] Scientists and intellectuals thus proposed an implementation of "higher salaries, better housing for workers, and improved nutrition" as the resolution for eliminating tuberculosis.[370]

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[367] Cited in de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 179. Also see Bronfman, *Measures of Equality*; Nancy Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).
[368] According to the 1919 census, blacks compromised 11.2 percent of the population; mulattoes compromised 16.0 percent. *See* Alejandro de la Fuente, "Race and Inequality in Cuba, 1899-1981" *Journal of Contemporary History* 30 (January 1995): 131-168.
[369] Cited in de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 180.
[370] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 180.

Scientists' and medical professionals' attention to the material conditions leading to social inequality along the lines of class and race provided a new rationale for addressing Cuba's African presence within its culture and citizenry. During the opening decades of the century, state officials projected a white elite masculine vision of the nation. However, by the mid-1920s, these national visions were beginning to change.[371] State officials recognized that their attempts to "whiten" the national population had failed, as blacks and mulattoes remained a sizeable proportion of the population.[372] Additionally, nationalist intellectuals referenced scientific studies to argue that all races were created equal.[373] Similar to Brazilian and Mexican nationalist narratives that claimed a racial democracy, Cuban intellectuals began to highlight the influence of racial and cultural miscegenation in the formation of a modern nation.[374] Writers and artists celebrated the melding of European and African traditions to create a distinct Cuban identity and promoted the sexual union of black women and white men to produce a *mulatto* culture.[375]

While the 1920s brought changing racial ideologies, a heightened class consciousness, and new gender formations, Afro-Cuban women continued to stand at the intersection of

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371 Robin Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness: Afro-Cubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana,1920-1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997).
372 de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 177.
373 de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 178.
374 See Nancy Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics;* Richard Graham, Ed., *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870-1940* (Austin: University of Texas at Austin Press, 1990).
375 Vera Kutzinski, *Sugar's Secrets: Race and the Erotics of Cuban Nationalism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993); Luz Mena, "Stretching the Limits of Gendered Spaces: Black and Mulatto Women in 1830s Havana" *Cuban Studies* 36 (2005): 87-104.

nationalist discourses and political movements in both antagonistic and complementary ways. From one perspective, discourses of *cubanidad* (Cuban identity) tended to draw from colonial tropes of black female sexuality as pre-modern, hypersexual street workers and temptresses, thereby perpetuating the negative stereotypical representations of Afro-Cuban womanhood. Dominant narratives of what was or was not considered "modern" presented black women as the antithesis of the nation's cultural development. At the same time, movements for racial, labor, and gender reform established a more inclusive political agenda that crossed social boundaries and recognized the particular experiences of black women. Therefore, many Cubans discussed black women's marginalization in order to highlight the failures of national progress.

BLACK WOMEN AND NATIONAL POLITICS

In a politically tumultuous and economically distressed Cuba, ponderings of the black female experience elucidate how women of color theorized citizenship and Afro-Cuban community formation, saw themselves in the world, and negotiated work and social relationships. Following the beginning of Machado's presidency in 1925, analyses of the black female identity assumed special significance for Afro-Cuban women; the rise of Marxist critiques of racial, gender, and class oppression among radical activists who acknowledged black women's persistent marginalization within society legitimized Afro-Cuban women's claims to social equality. Yet many whites and Afro-Cuban men continued to deride black women as the carriers of immorality and cultural backwardness within the community of color. Numerous Afro-Cuban women resisted such

characterizations: through their writings and activism they responded to attacks on their collective character by emphasizing structural inequalities, highlighting the ways in which the lack of political representation and social equality failed Cubans in general and black women in particular.

National politics during the late 1920s and early 1930s were rife with debates over labor legislation, in addition to democratic debates that affected the rights of black women. Women's suffrage, protection from discrimination within social and educational institutions, and the security of jobs and social services for women and children were just a few of the many issues affecting women of color who identified as black, female, and worker. Labor activist Inocencia Valdés, presented a purposeful missive to the Cuban communist newspaper *Noticias de Hoy* in which she championed the right of marginalized Cubans to pursue legal equality:

> "Every woman should fight. Women, blacks, and workers need to set their sights on a constitution approved by a sovereign constituency. I, for my part, am creating an intense propaganda campaign among women tobacco workers."[376]

Suggesting that women were entitled to pursue legal reform, Valdés underscored the need for a new constitution that would finally recognize the rights of all Cubans within a sovereign, democratic nation. Valdés, like many female workers before her, became active in numerous political organizations in order to create opportunities for poor black women to escape poverty. In many ways, her revolutionary spirit resulted from her upbringing in a politically involved family during the independence movement: She was the daughter of Juan Valdés, a tobacco worker who was forced to immigrate with his

[376] "La Entrevista de Hoy: Inocencia Valdes," *Noticias de Hoy* 7 July 1938.

family to the United States due to his revolutionary activities during the Ten Years War (1868–1878). Valdés grew up in a household where revolutionaries regularly convened.[377] As a young worker, she became a labor activist who served as secretary of the club Mariana Grajales and president of an organization called The Auxiliaries of the Revolution. Between 1913 and 1917, Valdés migrated between Cuba and Key West for work before settling permanently in Havana. In 1918, she rose to prominence as a Havana activist when she served as a member of the Tobacco Stemmers Guild; three years later, Valdés was elected president of the guild. In 1924 she served as a delegate at the First Congress of the Worker's Federation of Havana, and she ardently fought for "equal work, equal pay, and for the vindication of the proletariat."[378]

Valdés' commitment to the rights of the working poor—women, in particular—brought her into contact with feminist activists during the 1920s. The National Association of Women's Associations invited Valdés to speak on behalf of women working in the tobacco industry at the Second National Women's Congress of 1925.[379] Organized primarily by white elite and middle-class feminists, Valdés was one of a few Afro-Cuban women who participated in the four-day event. She spoke on behalf of the Havana Tobacco Workers' Union, addressing the difficulties that tobacco laborers—the majority of whom were women—faced due to the current economic crisis. The crash of the economy during the 1920s led to the failure of both the sugar and tobacco industries and resulted in thousands of Cubans losing their jobs. Falling wages forced the already

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[377] Pedro Luis Padrón, *La mujer trabajadora*, 22-23.
[378] Padrón, *La mujer trabajadora*.
[379] Evidence suggest that few, if any, women of color were involved in the First National Women's Congress held in 1923.

poor workers to face starvation and struggle to pay their rent. As Valdés presented the grim reality of tobacco laborers, she emphasized that the main problem lay in the limited employment opportunities available to women. Cuban women, according to Valdés, "had few open doors" beyond the tobacco and domestic service industries.[380] Given such limited possibilities to support their homes, poor women became "casualties" of "their greedy employers." Valdés called upon Congress delegates to help create educational opportunities for her colleagues. If the Association members wanted to help working women, Valdés suggested that they establish schools to provide them with the intellectual development necessary to obtain better paying positions and "demonstrate that the Cuban woman is capable of doing the same as her sisters of other countries, countries where women shine at the same level as men."[381] Upon concluding the Congress, attendees announced in their official bulletin their support for women tobacco stemmers and working women in general. Their final summary highlighted the need for laws that protected women workers "in all orders," and called for the establishment of night schools to prepare poor women for work.[382]

Valdés' statements in *Noticias de Hoy* and before the delegates of the 1925 National Women's Congress reflect that she was able to dissect the identities of poor black women to emphasize particular rights—as blacks, women, and workers—that connected them to seemingly disparate social movements. Through her leadership, she

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[380] Inocencia Valdés, "El Trabajo femenino en la industria tabacalera," *Comision Redactora de la Memoria del Segundo Congreso Nacional de Mujeres* (1925): 194-6.
[381] "El Trabajo femenino en la industria tabacalera."
[382] "Conclusiones," *Comision Redactora de la Memoria del Segundo Congreso Nacional de Mujeres* (1925): 646-8.

brought the issues affecting poor black women to both the labor and feminist movements. Valdés challenged political leaders to expand their agendas to include racial discrimination, education for the underprivileged, and labor rights within the agricultural sector. However, though she represented the Havana tobacco worker's union, including the tobacco stemmers sector, which was dominated by black women, Valdés' speech at the 1925 National Women's Congress emphasized members' gender and economic status, not race. There are at least two possibilities for this occurrence. First, in 1925, major labor organizations had only begun to address the ways in which discrimination affected blacks in particular. Critiques of racism had not yet become standard within discourses of the labor movement. Second, most white feminist associations did not incorporate race and the experiences of race in their analyses of social or political equality. Nevertheless, Valdés's declarations show that Afro-Cuban women engaged in political debates that sought to improve the rights and material conditions of black women, though these discussions were not always explicitly defined by race.

While Afro-Cuban women's involvement in movements for gender and labor reform originated during the colonial era, the 1920s and 1930s witnessed the rise of prominent female Afro-Cuban leaders who frequently traveled between feminist, aspiring-class Afro-Cuban, and urban and rural labor associations to promote racial and gender equality. For example, during the 1930s, Valdés joined the anti-Machado movement as a member of the Women's Labor Union (ULM), an organization that denounced bourgeois capitalism and advocated for a classless society.[383] Matehu, the

[383] Stoner, From the House to the Streets, 116.

well-known doctor living in Havana, became active in the Afro-Cuban civic organization the Asociación Cultural Femenina (Women's Cultural Association, or ACF). She also served on the central committee of the National Women's Union (UNM), a group established "to fight for the national liberation of Cuba and organize women to obtain their just social valorization."[384] During the 1930s, Afro-Cuban domestic worker Elvira Rodríguez became a vocal leader of the Union of Domestic Workers, and Afro-Cuban tobacco stemmer Teresa García frequently published newspaper articles as an executive committee member of the Cigar Workers Union. These individuals also worked with other Afro-Cuban women, including Felicita Ortiz and Consuelo Silveira, who entered the communist movement through labor unions. Perhaps the most prominent communist leader was pharmacist Esperanza Sánchez of Oriente Province, who served as the only black woman elected as a delegate of the 1940 Constitutional Assembly.

All of these women played important roles in the struggle for gender, class, and racial equality. Many of them gave speeches on gender rights before Afro-Cuban societies, spoke of the need to include women's rights on the agendas of labor unions, and highlighted the "triple discrimination" experienced by black women before women's associations. As such, they helped to bring issues affecting black women to the forefront of feminist, communist, and Afro-Cuban agendas for social reform.

[384] Fondo Donativos y Remisiones, Legajo 16, Expediente 159, ANC.

Afro-Cuban Feminism in the 1930s

Afro-Cuban feminists continued to articulate their roles in Cuban society in relation to racial understandings and evolving gender norms during the late 1920s and 1930s. For instance, feminists writing for Afro-Cuban periodicals such as *Adelante* and columns such as "Ideales" helped bring issues identified by the woman's movement to the elite and aspiring-class community of color. For example, feminist writer Catalina Pozo Gato, journalist Calixta María Hernández de Cervantes, and lawyer Cloris Tejo wrote about women's political rights and the economic marginalization of black women within Cuban society. Educator Consuelo Serra and University of Havana professor Ana Etchegoyen de Cañizares published articles on motherhood, spirituality, and pedagogy. Residing with the capital city of Havana, this group of women of color infused mainstream feminist ideologies with racial uplift to create a contemporary black feminist discourse during the 1930s.

Afro-Cuban feminist's intellectual engagement with the women's movement remained troubled by racial hierarchies. Afro-Cuban feminists struggled to publish in national periodicals such as *Carteles* and *El Pueblo*. Instead, they published articles primarily within the Afro-Cuban press. Urrutia helped address this dilemma in 1933, when he advertised that white feminist magazine editors Berta Arozarena de Martínez Marquez and Rene Méndez Capote de Solis had reached out to him in order to recruit black women to contribute to their magazine.[385] The editors sought to rectify divisions between white and black feminist by recruiting Afro-Cuban women writers for their

[385] Gustavo Urrutia, "Mujeres nuevas," *Diario de la Marina* 15 February 1933.

recently formed writers' association. "We white women," Arozarena and Méndez explained in their announcement, "and you black women work separated by the color line that ruins us both." They continued, "We recognize in you all of our strengths and weaknesses and call you to our side without requiring conditions." No document that I found indicates if Afro-Cuban women did indeed become members of the writers' association. However, that Arozarena and Méndez chose to reach out to black women highlights that white women were aware of the racial divisions within the feminist movement and attempted to bridge such divisions.

Afro-Cuban feminists practiced their political beliefs as community organizers, notably in the establishment of the Asociación Cultural Femenina (Feminine Cultural Association, or ACF) in 1935 Founded by Serra, the ACF served as an Afro-Cuban women's organization committed to "the civic and cultural betterment of women."[386] Women of color provided typing classes for poor and aspiring-class girls, promoted literacy, and organized social events such as dances. In turn, Afro-Cuban periodicals heralded the work of these social thinkers. For example, a 1938 article praised Etchegoyen for her work "on behalf of the Cuban woman, and the black woman in particular."[387] Importantly, these women represented Havana's professional class of society members who regularly attended the dances and conferences held by the elite association Club Atenas and the aspiring-class organization Unión Fraternal. Their connection to Havana's educated community of color suggests that, though concerned

[386] Fondo Asociaciones, Legajo 111, Nos. 23246-23248, ANC.
[387] Calixta Hernández de Cervantes, "Mujeres Ejemplares: Ana Etchegoyen," *Adelante* (February 1938).

with problems affecting all black women, their socioeconomic status distinguished them from black women who formed part of the laboring poor.

Feminists of color were dedicated to gender reform—both social and legal—that would improve the material conditions of poor black women, and their publications exemplify this commitment. However, these discourses did not radically challenge patriarchy. In 1929, Calixta María Hernández de Cervantes wrote "Tópicos Femeninos" ("Women's Topics") for Urrutia's column, "Ideales." Within the article, she proclaimed that woman, "a slave during many centuries of oppression and struggle," had at last been able to develop in an environment "increasingly conducive" to women's social and intellectual progress.[388] Hernández avowed women's right to fight for the triumph of Cuba and humanity. Yet, even as she defended the feminist movement, Hernández stressed that feminist ideology did not entail "the open fight of women against men to achieve the best posts."[389] Instead, she wanted women to fight alongside their male counterparts and asked only for "cooperation, justice and, above all, love."[390]

Hernández's perspective remained consistent in her writings published during the late 1920s and 1930s. In a piece that appeared in *Adelante* in 1935, she articulated a vision of feminism in which women "were incorporated into the grooves of the electoral machine" as full citizens with suffrage rights.[391] Having participated in the fight for Cuban independence, she argued that Cuban woman had "earned the right to penetrate the political arena in order to contribute with the support of her militancy the resolution

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[388] Calixta María Hernández, "Tópicos Femeninos," *Diario de la Marina* 28 July 1929.
[389] "Tópicos Femeninos."
[390] "Tópicos Femeninos."
[391] "Feminismo: La mujer y la política," *Adelante* September 1935.

of the grave problems that presented themselves on the horizon of *cubanidad*."[392] Reflecting on the options available to women, she asked, "Which political party has affiliated itself with women in order to carryout their mission?"[393] Even more, she questioned if women should "affiliate themselves with parties controlled by men or those which had been exclusively formed and run by women."[394] She recognized that women took a risk in building political alliances with men when she reflected on the difficult union between the women's political organization the Alianza Nacional Feminista (National Feminist Alliance, or ANF) and the political party Conjunto Nacional Democrático (National Democratic Group, formerly the Partido Conservador). The Conjunto leaders broke from their partnership with the ANF in order to form a separate party and maintain their right to make their own decisions. Despite this political conflict, Hernández maintained that women should not isolate themselves from men.

When writing for the Afro-Cuban press, Hernández consistently argued that Cuba could not be a modern nation without women having full citizenship rights. Though led primarily by elite and middle-class white women, feminists and suffragists across the island demanded full citizenship as voting members of society. Many Afro-Cuban women took part in the suffrage movement through published debates within Afro-Cuban periodicals, as well as through their participation in the mainstream woman's movement.[395] After decades of activism, women finally received right to vote in 1934,

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[392] "Feminismo: La mujer y la política."
[393] "Feminismo: La mujer y la política."
[394] "Feminismo: La mujer y la política."
[395] For instance, the historian and socialite Angelina Edreira and medical doctor Maria Julia de Lara attended the 1925 Second National Women's Congress.

though this privilege would not be fully realized until the ratification of the 1940 Constitution.

While women of color published feminist writings within Afro-Cuban periodicals and columns and spoke at congresses and other events, their views of class and gender occasionally conflicted with male Afro-Cuban perspectives on morality and racial advancement. For instance, intellectual Gerardo Del Valle engaged in a debate with feminist writer Catalina Pozo Gato over the nature of black women's oppression. The debate appeared as two separate articles published in the "Ideales de una Raza" column in November 1930.[396] In his article, Del Valle explained that he combined statistical analysis with an examination of social environments to understand how black women lived. He characterized black women by two "transcendental qualities": a black mother's "great love" for her children and her "passionate patriotism." Citing the example of the beloved patriot-mother Mariana Grajales, he explained that black women rightly sought to make their children "instruments of national glory and exaltation."[397] Many black mothers reared their young to become successful professionals. Del Valle pronounced, "The black woman is proud of her Cuban nationality and proclaims it to the four winds…Within her ignorance beats a rare instinct for social concern, rebellious and daring."[398]

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[396] Column editor Gustavo Urrutia likely arranged the exchange between the Afro-Cuban intellectuals to provoke a gendered analysis of racial politics in Cuba, a strategy that he employed throughout the duration of his column.

[397] Mariana Grajales was the mother of the nineteenth-century Afro-Cuban independence war hero, Antonio Maceo. Grajales lost a total of eight children who fought in the war. She, along with Antonio Maceo's wife, Maria Cabrales, participated in the war by providing support and medical care for Liberation Army soldiers.

[398] Gerardo del Valle, "La Mujer Negra," *Diario de la Marina* November 1930.

Yet, while Del Valle praised black women for their commitment to Cuban progress as mothers, he identified the ways in which black women became marginalized within impoverished communities. For example, though a high percentage of children of color were born into poverty, Del Valle reported that, statistically, few black women committed infanticide. Black women rarely "got rid of their children" in order to better manage the financial hardships of life.[399] He asserted that anyone who visited the *solares*, or poor urban housing communities, would find numerous women of color surrounded by four, six, or as many as ten children. These struggling black mothers "fought heroically" to feed their families by washing or ironing clothes "without complaining about their cruel and selfish fathers." Importantly, he reminded readers that stores did not hire black women, in spite of the "pseudo-feminists" who did everything possible to ensure that black girls would "clean the schools, learn a trade, or enter the normal schools [schools that trained teachers]" when they came of age.[400] To Del Valle, black women remained vulnerable in a society that perpetuated their subjugated status through racial exclusion in labor and inadequate preparation for professional careers.

Even as Del Valle suggested that black women "loyally sacrifice[d] themselves and triumph[ed] with their labor," he concluded that the majority of these women were culturally backwards.[401] As proclaimed by Del Valle: "No social class has needed more to overcome the dark forest of ignorance which has engulfed them for so long as black women." True, normal schools had produced some caring and conscientious teachers and

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[399] "La Mujer Negra."
[400] "La Mujer Negra."
[401] "La Mujer Negra."

professors of modern pedagogy able to "water the seed in the daughters of the people." But the majority of black women, "genuine and simple," succumbed to "perverse occult ideals under the veil of mystery": witchcraft, black magic, and ideas of false spirits.[402] Del Valle determined that superstitious beliefs undermined the souls and pocketbooks of black women and their families.

While affirming Del Valle's analysis of poverty and racism in relation to the social and economic marginalization of black women, Afro-Cuban feminist writer Catalina Pozo Gato responded in an article that challenged "Ideales" readers to look beyond the social behaviors of black women. Acknowledging that Del Valle had accurately presented a segment of Cuban society and the "inhuman disappointing results" of its unfair prejudice, Pozo critiqued Del Valle's study by focusing on "the unwritten space between" the lines of his article that relegated black women to "the fringes."[403] She adamantly declared that black women had suffered from racial discrimination within employment, noting that many who received training as dentists, pharmacists, lawyers, and doctors worked as dressmakers in stores controlled by "Poles" (Polish workers and business owners), earning a "vexing salary" that forced them to stay poor. Even the most skillful and intelligent young woman of color received positions in which they earned minimum wages as operators rather than managers. Not even within private offices would Cuban or foreign employers hire "prepared girls" from the community of color. As

[402] "La Mujer Negra."
[403] "La Mujer Negra."

identified by Pozo, the true problem lay in the fact that, being poor, black women did not have the same possibilities of employment as their "white sisters."[404]

Two aspects of this public debate represented a significant shift in discourses of race, gender, and community progress among Cubans of color during the 1920s and 1930s. First, Del Valle and Pozo referred to the experiences of "the black woman," rather than those of the "woman of color" or "woman of the colored race." As such, they employed language that deviated from the racial terminology used during the early decades of the republic. Second, both authors incorporated a class-based analysis of black women's experiences to highlight how social conditions perpetuated their marginalization and undermined equality. Yet while Del Valle examined black women's class status in terms of cultural inferiority, Pozo insisted that "Ideales" readers interrogate the impact of social inequalities on their lives. Thus, by focusing on the ramifications of capitalist exploitation, she helped create a new framework through which women of color evaluated how racial and gender discrimination maintained their position "on the fringes."[405]

As the debate between Del Valle and Pozo Gato illustrates, Afro-Cuban feminists' understandings of black womanhood occasionally diverged from male Afro-Cuban perspectives on gender and racial advancement. Another notable instance of conflicting views arose at the 1938 National Convention of Black Societies, one of several conventions organized periodically by Afro-Cuban club leaders to help coordinate their

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[404] Dra. Catalina Pozo Gato, "La Negra cubana y la cultura: para el escritor Gerardo del Valle, en indagacion," *Diario de la Marina*, 30 November 1930.
[405] "La Negra cubana y la cultura."

organizations' objectives and activities. In a June 1938 article published in *Adelante*, Havana lawyer and activist Cloris Tejo complained that the delegates let their personal agendas affect their judgment in identifying policy changes. Tejo was one attendee of the Convention, which was dedicated to achieving racial equality. Several discussions left her infuriated with those whom she labeled the "black aristocracy."[406] For example, delegates proposed a ban that would prohibit minors under the age of 12 from selling newspapers in the streets. Tejo explained that, while "not in favor of children engaged in the sale of newspapers," she recognized that their work provided a necessary income for their households. Thus, she could not allow their parents to be judged negatively for allowing their children to work or for parents to feel forced to abandon their children out of financial necessity. She claimed this would only lead to the children populating the city streets "in search of the degrading alms that society throws them."[407] Tejo accused the Convention members of failing to acknowledge the stigma placed on the black mother and father.

Tejo's article abounded with incensed language about the need for aspiring-class Afro-Cubans to productively address poverty within the community of color. According to Tejo, the problem with the discussions that took place at the Convention was that the delegates did not entail a "general and comprehensive character covering the basic problems of the black race," but rather "a determined black social layer."[408] She believed that the delegates failed to address all of the moral, economic, and social conditions that

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[406] Cloris Tejo. "En Torno a la Convención de Sociedades Negras." *Adelante* 3 (June 1938): 5.
[407] "En Torno a la Convención de Sociedades Negras."
[408] "En Torno a la Convención de Sociedades Negras."

maintained the marginalization of poor blacks. As a result, the delegates had taken steps to "attack the disease without taking into account the underlying causes of war." Tejo linked the ramifications of this failure to the plight of black women. She reminded the delegates that "moral" black mothers "did not have the fortune" of attaining mobility through the political and social networks available to professionally established black families. Challenging members of the aspiring class to focus on structural issues rather than moral judgments, she asserted that no one had the right to condemn others without having "provided the means to eliminate" the problem. In addition, the activist passionately asserted that "The prisons need to be substituted with reform schools, because history has shown that prisons have not lessened the number of delinquents." Tejo even suggested that the legal system should include a humanitarian perspective that recognized the experiences of the individual—or, to invoke her own language, "laws for constructive character-edifying."[409]

By aligning herself with issues affecting women, blacks, and the poor, Tejo situated issues affecting black mothers and children within the "comprehensive" agenda of the race, and in doing so typified Afro-Cuban women's acknowledgement of the black female experience. Her article not only provided a perspective from which the delegates could actively tackle poverty as they pursued racial equality, it culminated with those very proposals: "The moral and economic liberation of poor blacks must begin with the work of poor blacks themselves."[410] Tejo thus suggested that the convention delegates address the economic conditions affecting poor blacks rather than denigrating their social

[409] "En Torno a la Convención de Sociedades Negras."
[410] "En Torno a la Convención de Sociedades Negras."

behaviors. Writing as a black woman, she affirmed her commitment to all women who had to send their children to sell newspapers or to let their daughters labor as prostitutes.

At no time during the 1930s were all Afro-Cuban women of one mind about which political philosophy would best help them improve the social status of black women. Yet by 1939, numerous individuals had become prominent leaders of the women's movement and fought for legal reform as workers, activists, and intellectuals. Organizers such as Inocencia Valdés, Esperanza Sánchez, and Consuelo Silveira constituted a coalition of women who worked towards the "moral and economic liberation" of black women and their families within multiple organizations, including the communist movement that rapidly expanded during the 1930s.

Though the Afro-Cuban feminists writing for *Adelante* and those who were active in the communist party came from different social circles, all of them would come together as delegates at the Third National Women's Congress in 1939. Each woman believed in the potential for obtaining citizenship rights and bringing about social reform within the unified women's movement.

AFRO-CUBAN FEMINISTS AND THE THIRD NATIONAL WOMEN'S CONGRESS OF 1939

Situating understandings of black womanhood within its historical context and understanding of why feminists strategically sought the participation of women of color entails a study of the Third National Women's Congress of 1939. Similar to the First and Second National Women's Congress of 1923 and 1925, the Third Congress operated

under the assumption that Cuban women were responsible for ensuring national progress as mothers and wives. Yet articles published by Afro-Cuban feminists prior to and during the Congress revealed numerous philosophical transformations within the Cuban women's movement.[411] As historians have shown, the women's movement during the 1930s had developed from a narrow focus on "women's" issues to an analysis of women's subordination in relationship to other forms of oppression."[412] First, the committee members' and delegates' goals for the Congress included equal pay, legal rights, and opportunities for employment. These goals marked a significant shift in Cuban feminist thought, which had previously affirmed women's subordinate role to men within national development.[413] Second, the Congress' platform served the dual purpose of incorporating a diverse range of individuals into the women's movement. No longer solely comprised of and planned by white elite and middle-class members, the Third Congress brought together more than 2,000 women from all backgrounds: urban and rural, white and black, the rich and the laboring poor, professional and non-professional (including factory workers, domestic laborers, and *campesinas*), and women of various political and religious affiliations. Because of this, dialogues during the event featured a range of perspectives on womanhood in relation to political representation and social

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411 See Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*, 162.

412 Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*.

413 An article published published by the Executive Committee in *Hoy* days before the Congress explained, "Y todo esto no porque 'se destruya la familia' o porque se eche a menos el hogar. No. No puede haber buen hogar si la mitad del mismo se mantiene como en tiempos del feudalismo; si la mujer no tiene iguales derechos que su companero. No puede haber Buena comunidad, si la mujer no tiene iguales derechos al trabajo que el hombre, o iguales derechos con igualdad de pago. Con este Nuevo y necesario concepto de la mujer, ella se hace mas fuerto, crece en cultura, es de mayor utilidad a la humanidad sirviendola tanto desde os anguos de trabajo como desde los angulos de la ciencia y el arte." See "Congreso de mujeres," *Noticias de Hoy* 19 April 1939.

equality. Finally, Congress organizers addressed the particular experiences of the black women for first time; they emphasized racial unity, included racial discrimination on their list of social issues, and asserted the legal rights of black women as workers. As participants committed to these efforts, Afro-Cuban feminist helped build a cross-racial political alliance that would demand institutional reform during the 1940 Constitutional Assembly.[414]

While the executive committee's call to "all Cuban women" captured the spirit of the Third National Women's Congress, perhaps the word *unification* better elaborates that spirit: "This women's movement will rise above all circumstantial religious or racial distinctions, constituting us as a force capable of guaranteeing the rights of women and children, the peace and progress of Cuban society."[415] If the women's movement was to be successful in obtaining social equality, race and class had to be acknowledged and discussed so that it addressed the multiplicity of women's concerns. Committee members and delegates circulated articles and interviews from a variety of national and regional newspapers and journals that appealed to women of all social backgrounds. The committee members were concerned with what they felt was a failure of the government to protect women and children. Moreover, they insisted that women be given the opportunity to advocate for themselves within public institutions as the equal of their male counterparts. As noted by Afro-Cuban Oriente Province delegate Catalina Causse Vda. de Mercer: "It is not a question of blacks or whites, rather it is in the general interest

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[414] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 210-258.
[415] Maria Nuñez, "Postura de la Mujer Cubana Frente al Congreso Femenino Que se Celebrara en la Habana," *Diario de Cuba* 12 March 1939.

of all conscious women, their duty and responsibility, to obtain a post in the collective movement for social betterment on behalf of our children."[416] From this perspective, Congress organizers and attendees asserted that the success of Cuba's political system necessitated every woman's full participation.

That Causse rejected the "question" of distinct black or white responsibilities is not surprising considering that Cuban women of color played a major role in the development of the Congress. Headed by the white feminist and poet laureate Dulce María Borrero, the executive committee included prominent Afro-Cuban professionals and activists from throughout the island. Consuelo Silveira, an Afro-Cuban Havana labor movement leader, served as the committee's vice-secretary of finance. University of Havana professor Ana Etchegoyen de Cañizares was selected as the secretary of correspondence. The executive committee also included several Afro-Cuban women as *vocales* (voting members of the committee): Teresa García from the Havana Tobacco Workers' Union, educator and historian Angelina Edreira, union leader and domestic worker Elvira Rodríguez, feminist journalist and lawyer Catalina Pozo Gato, pharmacist Esperanza Sánchez Mastrapa from Gíbara (Oriente Province), and educator and writer María Dámasa Jova from Santa Clara. Importantly, conference organizers aimed to create an atmosphere where women would leave their political leanings behind (as political perspectives created divisions among women at the 1923 and 1925 congresses); yet many women represented the interests of social groups affiliated with labor unions and political organizations. The 1939 Congress, thus, reflected a leadership change in which Afro-

[416] Catalina Causse Vda. de Mercer, "Congreso Femenino," *Diario de Cuba* 29 March 1939.

Cuban women activists from a range of political and professional backgrounds came together to promote legal reform on behalf of black women and Cuban women in general.

Black Womanhood and the Third National Women's Congress

María Patrocinado Garbey Aguila was at once uncharacteristic and representative of the Afro-Cuban women who were inspired to attend the Third National Women's Congress. A prominent activist committed to the social equality, Garbey held the rare position for a woman as the long-time president of the Centro Cultural Martín Morúa Delgado (Martín Morúa Delgado Cultural Center), the Afro-Cuban society in Santiago de Cuba.[417] Garbey's participation in multiple social movements made her political involvement demonstrative: in addition to her work within the aspiring-class community of Santiago de Cuba, she challenged gender and labor discrimination within the early twentieth century worker's movement. In 1914, she attended the National Labor Convention as a representative of "Cuban women from Oriente Province."[418] In 1939, she brought her public leadership to the National Women's Congress to advocate for the betterment of Cuban womanhood. Reflecting on the developing political and social life of Cuban women during the republican period, Garbey exclaimed that the realization of the National Women's Congress (which she referred to as the National Feminist Congress) signified "a significant step forward taken by the Cuban woman" in her evolution. As she explained, "that which results will be helpful for women themselves and, as consequence,

[417] Registro de Asociaciones, Legajo 2455, Expediente 10, APHSC
[418] Maria Patrocinia Garbey Aguila, *Diario de Cuba* 12 March 1939.

for our country."[419] Garbey thus wrote, "Women, may your work of redemption remain unfazed, so that you may forever live as the 'face of the Sun.'"[420]

Garbey's endorsement of women's work towards national development was certainly in sync with other Afro-Cuban society women who expressly affirmed the mission of the Third National Women's Congress. Indeed, women of color frequently organized other black women on behalf of the feminist movement for constitutional reform. In preparation for the Congress, the women of the Afro-Cuban society Luz de Oriente hosted a meeting to discuss the "main problems that affect the black women of Oriente."[421] They aimed to compile a list of issues that concerned black women that would interest "white women as much as women of color."[422] Thus the society women's suggestive evocation of both white and Afro-Cuban women claimed the possibility that black women's equality would lead to "a better future for [all] Cuban women."[423]

Given that unity was an organizing principle of the 1939 Congress, and since the event had both a racial and class-focused emphasis, it was not surprising when Afro-Cuban women appealed to all women to join the movement in support of black women's issues. In February of the same year, women of the Federación of Sociedades Negras (Federation of Black Societies) published an article entitled "La Mujer en General y la Mujer Negra en Particular" ("Woman in General and the Black Woman in Particular") in

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[419] María Patrocinado Garbey Aguila, "Una Opinion Sobre el Congreso Femenino," *Diario de Cuba* 12 March 1939.
[420] "Una Opinion Sobre el Congreso Femenino."
[421] "Una Opinion Sobre el Congreso Femenino."
[422] "Una Opinion Sobre el Congreso Femenino."
[423] "Gran actividad de la mujer oriental para el Congreso," *Noticias de Hoy* 7 April 1939.

the national communist newspaper *Noticias de Hoy*.[424] Signed by members of the organizing committee of the Asamblea Provincial de Mujeres Negras (Provincial Assembly of Black Women)—and elite clubwomen Mercedes Ruis de Andrade, Digna Ferrera González, Francisca Romay Valdés, feminist writer Cloris Tejo Hernández, and committee secretary Esther Torriente Moncada—the brief, yet loaded, manifesto carved out a particular place for black women in contemporary political debates as they addressed constitutional reform. Their language was straightforward and passionate, and it targeted racial intolerance: the women assailed that

> [W]e cannot deny or ignore that sensitive developments—which have occurred in our Nation since before the foundation of the Republic—have created a painful situation in which one finds the highest percentage of exploited women, battered mothers, and lack of food to prepare and to educate men capable of conceiving a radiant future of justices and of laying the foundations for a society of brotherhood, peace, and love—where they find shelter from petty racial prejudice and economic inequalities that currently impede man's life. […] That is why, despite our great ideological values, we hold in our minds a poor ethnic classification based on the absurdity of racial superiority or inferiority.[425]

Thus, to complete their "duty as women," they intended "to fight tenaciously so that the black woman might take her place in the National Women's Congress as women." The writers of "La Mujer en General" focused on tensions between the assumptions of racial difference and social unity as they addressed the contributions of black women to state reform. For example, Torriente Moncada and her peers maintained that the "inconsistencies" between the rhetoric of racial equality and the existence with racial discrimination in Cuba's past and present should not prevent black women from joining

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[424] "La Mujer en General y La Mujer Negra en Particular," *Noticias de Hoy* 18 February 1939.
[425] "La Mujer en General y La Mujer Negra en Particular."

the movement, as it was dangerous for Afro-Cubans to "remain indifferent to the call to [all] Cuban women." Even as the women addressed the involvement of black women, they spoke as "Cuban women, as conscientious mothers," committed to political redevelopment. Additionally, the society women recalled the slave woman who, "in a gesture of humanity," offered "the fruits of her love" to the independence cause.[426] By denying ethnic differences among Cubans and reiterating black women's contributions to Cuban sovereignty, the organizing committee members of the Asamblea Provincial de Mujeres Negras determined that women of color served as contributors to national women's dialogue for social and legal reform.

Whether newspaper editors intended to bring Cuban women together across racial divides or to confirm black women's place within the feminist movement, Afro-Cuban women employed public political discourses to challenge racial discrimination, the particular experiences of black women, and the resistance against black women's participation in the Congress by some white women. A few weeks before the opening celebrations, *Oriente*, one of the major regional newspapers of the eastern province, printed a letter from Afro-Cuban activist Pastora Causede de Atiés directed to other black women of Santiago de Cuba. She responded to statements that "the development of assemblies with large numbers of black women in attendance" resulted in racial prejudice within the women's movement.[427] Perhaps she sought to address the concerns of some white women who may have become alarmed by the sight of so many women of color who served as organizing members and delegates or those who may have resented the

[426] "La Mujer en General y La Mujer Negra en Particular."
[427] "A la mujer cubana, y la negra en particular."

prominent position that racial discrimination held in the Congress agenda. Causede emphasized the stake that black women held in the movement. As she explained to the group of resisters on behalf of black women: "Us [black women] we're struggling, we're applying the pressure that these key organizations need and appealing to women from the highest positions to the most humble." Thus, Causede put in plain words that black women were "initiating a series of acts" to alleviate their own issues since their efforts had "not been matched" by their white counterparts.[428]

The author could have replicated the language of unification to appeal to those put off by the discussions of race at the National Women's Congress. Yet she purposefully pointed out the dilemmas confronted by black women of the eastern province within their daily lives. Causede astutely observed,

> There is only one real thing that exists: the black woman has responded to this clarion call because her problems have not been resolved; because it is difficult to enroll her children in some schools; because apart from making a physical, monetary, and intellectual effort it is difficult to reach the goal of her desires; […] because she does not have the right to hold public offices as more than a simple typist after many recommendations; because neither as a worker can she occupy a post in public establishments nor as a cook or nanny.[429]

Causede highlighted the limitations that she and her peers faced as mothers and workers—realities that illustrated the persistence of racial discrimination within Cuban society. She presented a nuanced approach for examining the experiences of black women. Similar to activists and intellectuals who argued that capitalist exploitation perpetuated black women's marginalization, Causede underscored the racialization of

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[428] Pastora Causede de Atiés, "Congreso Femenino," *Oriente* 5 April 1939.
[429] "Congreso Femenino."

labor and argued that skin color determined one's access to employment. Additionally, she emphasized that race limited black women from fulfilling their personal "desires." Racism, then, was more than an economic or social problem; it violated the individual freedoms entitled to every Cuban. If the Congress did not address these issues, Causede worried that the women of her community would be left behind in a developing society.[430]

Even as she sought to empower Cuban women through legal reform, Causede reminded the delegates of the National Woman's Congress that racial discrimination affected both women and men of color. She noted that "the black man fails to climb the ranks as mayor or other positions analogous with merit and ample ability."[431] She deemed such social conditions "an absurdity." Additionally, she determined that "[t]he years of fighting" that black men incurred during childhood were hardly rewarded as adult laborers, a compensation "always postponed." Not unlike black women's marginalization within employment, a black man might devote "the best years of his life to acquire a degree of proficiency," yet his training never seemed enough for "a post-occupancy as judge or in our courts or Justice of the Diplomatic or Cuban consular."[432] As she called attention to the labor discrimination that Cubans of color experienced, Causede linked the plight of black men to the struggles that black women faced.

Such an emphasis on black women's marginalization was neither incidental nor fleeting, for Causede scrutinized the subject while incorporating the hegemonic rhetoric

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[430] "Congreso Femenino."
[431] "Congreso Femenino."
[432] "Congreso Femenino."

of racial equality drawn from narratives of the independence movement.[433] She explained that barriers limiting employment opportunities for black women, education for their children, and personal livelihood exemplified why black women had "responded to the call" to join the Third National Women's Congress. She hoped that black women might make reality the aspirations of independence leaders Antonio Maceo and José Martí, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, and Guillermo Moncada. If the Congress provided an opportunity for black women to address issues that affected them as workers and mothers, their efforts would contribute to the greater cause of national progress.[434]

Afro-Cuban feminists continued to examine national politics and social equality from the perspectives of black women during the Congress. Included among them was 43-year-old Afro-Cuban poet and teacher María Dámasa Jova. Dámasa Jova was born in the town of Ranchuelo, Cuba in 1890. Though her parents made little money, they utilized their meager earnings to ensure that their daughter would receive an education. Their commitment to education must have had a significant impression on her. Dámasa Jova began teaching at the age of 13 and became a school director at 17. By the age of 22 she had moved to the provincial capital of Santa Clara, and soon became a well-known writer, teacher, social worker, and activist—fighting again racial, class, and gender oppression—within the province of Villa Clara. She also established a school to educate poor children, published separate children's and literary journals out of her home, and

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[433] Lillian Guerra, *The Myth of Jose Marti: Conflicting Nationalisms in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).
[434] Pastora Causede de Atiés, "Congreso Femenino" *Oriente* 5 April 1939.

participated in political organizations. Throughout her career, she created institutions designed to uplift her community through education as well as political activism.[435]

Her work and dedication, as well as her impoverished upbringing, made her especially attuned to the needs of Cuba's most marginalized populations. Thus, when helping to outline an agenda for women's advancement and "national stability" for the Congress in her speech, entitled, "La situación de la mujer negra en Cuba" ("The Situation of the Black Woman in Cuba"), she argued that "the black mother suffered most because she was the mother of the marginal black child, the prostitute, the little newspaper vendor, the gang of robbers, the great number of unemployed and illiterate, and the ill-mannered black child."[436] She went on to assert that discrimination within Cuba's schools undermined social equality, as they trained black girls to become ironers rather than professionals. "When the black woman is conceded her rights and when there is a [sizeable] percentage of black women in shops and offices, one can rest assured that women in Cuba are united and that the struggle for the their overall betterment and the interests of mothers and children," Dámasa Jova contended.[437] Thus, she asserted that any

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[435] In addition to her career as a teacher, Dámasa Jova was a prominent writer. She established *Umbrales*, a periodical that provided a venue for Afro-Cuban writers such as Nicolás Guillén, among others, to pursue intellectual development. She also founded and edited *Ninfas*, a children's magazine that focused on education in particular, and featured articles on pedagogy, poetry, and children's literature. Ninfas also became the name of Dámasa Jova's school. She later created a radio program broadcasted in Santa Clara, dedicated "to making labor civilized [and] channeling children toward the path of personal education."

[436] "Ella planteo que la madre negra tenia que sufrir mucho mas, porque era la madre del negrito marginal, de la prostituta, del vendedor de periodicos, del de la pandilla de salteadores, del mayor numero de desempleados e iletrados y del negrito soez."

[437] María Dámasa Jova Baro, "Ponencia presentada en el III Congreso Nacional de Mujeres" (La Habana, 1939). Cited in Esperanza Méndez Oliva, *El estirpe de Mariana en la Villas* (Santa Clara, Cuba: Editorial Capiro, 2006).

movement to bring about equality must include a commitment to securing the rights of black women and children.

Dámasa Jova was an exemplary woman of color who helped maintain a political network that encompassed a range of organizations, including the political party Conjunto Nacional Democrático (National Democratic Group). This network of groups reflected patterns of Afro-Cuban women's involvement in movements for reform and national discourses that extended across rural and urban communities throughout Cuba. Though this movement differed according to locale, the active members shared a common purpose—to eradicate structural issues affecting women, blacks, and workers as they developed visions for democratic reform.

As a public figure committed to defending "school, primary education, veterans, and mothers," Dámasa Jova's paper highlights a rare instance in which an Afro-Cuban feminist critically examined the role of white women in Cuba's national development.[438] As she reiterated points made by Afro-Cuban feminists throughout the 1930s, Dámasa Jova asserted that unity among Cuban women could occur only through the elimination of racial discrimination. She asserted that "the problem of racial discrimination called the attention of white women to the situation of black women."[439] She further explained, "One must note that in this fight for the vindication of the white woman that she holds the greatest responsibility in being able to reject her unjust privileges. She must fight for a redistribution of resources by rejecting her privileges so that the black woman might

[438] "Ponencia presentada en el III Congreso Nacional de Mujeres."
[439] "Ponencia presentada en el III Congreso Nacional de Mujeres."

receive her rights."[440] She thus implored white women to act on their stated commitment to racial solidarity. Historian Esperanza Méndez Oliva contends that Dámasa Jova's groundbreaking address demanded respect for the intellectual perspectives of black women, and it challenged white women to act on any cause affecting Cuban women, regardless of their race and color.[441] As Dámasa Jova called for cross-racial unity, she appealed to nationalist discourses and affirmed that racial unity was crucial to the realization of social equality.

Dámasa Jova's address highlights that the unification of Cuban women of all races entailed a discussion of the rights and social issues that confronted black women. Many Afro-Cuban women shared her concern with the survival of black families, and they presented these concerns to the delegates of the Congress. Yet the societal problems affecting women workers, mothers, and children figured prominently in the minds of all reform-minded women of the era. Indeed, a range of activists and politicians that included Juan Marinello and Ofelia Domínguez Navarro defined women's issues in relation to national progress and shared Afro-Cuban women's interests in labor reform, education, and the development of social services. "La situación de la mujer negra en Cuba" is the only available document in which a delegate specifically addressed the experiences of black women at the 1939 Third National Women's Congress.[442] However, by placing it alongside the Congress' conclusions summarized by the executive

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[440] "Ponencia presentada en el III Congreso Nacional de Mujeres."
[441] Oliva, *El estirpe de Mariana en la Villas*.
[442] The "Conclusiones" presented at the end of the conference references a speech given by the Afro-Cuban educator and Santiago de Cuba resident, Serafina Causse, but I have been unable to locate this document.

committee, we can better grasp how leaders of the women's movement integrated matters affecting the black woman into their agenda for legal reform.

During the final discussions of the Congress, attendees outlined a detailed proposal to submit to the 1940 Constitutional Assembly that reified their commitment to "women and children's improvement," in addition to "Cuban peace and progress."[443] One section, entitled "La mujer y los prejuicios raciales" ("Women and Racial Prejudice"), presented fifteen points that they wanted the delegates to take into consideration. The executive committee explicitly based their suggestions for political reorganization on Article I of the Constitution, which they cited, "All Cubans are equal before the law, and the law does not recognize exemptions or privileges."[444] No doubt, they recognized the centrality of this doctrine to Cuba's legal order, as their desire for solidarity and absolute equality across racial, professional, and regional differences constituted a central tenet of the Congress' discourse. The delegates of the National Women's Congress also understood that racial discrimination had persisted because of the government's failure to implement and enforce legislation for those who violated the Constitution. Therefore, the majority of the points featured in the proposal put forth new policies—such as maternity laws and public school curriculum reform—that addressed discrimination within the legal system, employment, education, and public places. These policies stood in line with reform issues

[443] "Conclusiones," AIH Registro General 10.6/76.
[444] "Conclusiones."

identified within labor unions, the Communist Party, and the Federación of Sociedades Negras (Federation of Black Societies).[445]

CONCLUSION

During the early decades of the twentieth century, a variety of public figures—scientists, artists, politicians, and activists—criticized political corruption and economic exploitation, and they called for a more inclusive understanding of citizenship and national identity that incorporated the perspectives women, workers, and Cubans of color. These critique employed analyses of the black female experiences to elucidate the intersecting forms of racial, gender, and economic oppression confronted by Cuban citizens and women of color in particular. Economic and political instability fueled mass mobilization among the popular classes, resulting in the overthrow of President Gerardo Machado and Cuba's oligarchic system in 1933. This transformation in Cuba's political culture created opportunities for a variety of social actors—including women, blacks, and the laboring poor.

As contributors to this political transformation during the 1930s, elite and aspiring-class women of color actively engaged in debates regarding the black female experience. In the process, they challenged elite Afro-Cuban intellectuals and society members to consider the ways in which gender created distinct experiences for black women. Intellectuals that included Consuelo Serra, Catalina Pozo Gato, and Cloris Tejo implored race reformists to move beyond negative stereotypical understandings of poor

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[445] "Conclusiones."

black mothers and their families and develop a critical analysis of how material inequalities perpetuated their marginalization. By writing for Afro-Cuban newspapers such as *Adelante* and mainstream newspaper columns like "Ideales de una Raza," women of color integrated contemporary feminist debates into discussions regarding racial progress and equality. In addition, the 1939 Third National Women's Congress illustrated a remarkable shift in the development of the Cuban women's movement. Few black women attended the 1923 and 1925 Congresses, and white elite and middle-class feminist organizers avoided a discussion of racial inequalities in the development of an agenda for legal reform. Yet, by 1939, organizers opened the Congress to women of all social groups: urban and rural, white and women of color, professional and laboring poor to create a broad-based movement for democratic reform. The frequent discussions of racial discrimination and the experiences of women of color within recruitment literature and throughout the Congress highlight this transformation.

The involvement of these women and other women of color within feminist, socialist, and Afro-Cuban social movements highlights the overlapping nature of political activity among movements for gender, labor, and racial reform. Leaders and activists of each movement frequently utilized discussions of a black female experience to mobilize Cubans across social divisions. Moreover, women of color began to examine the experiences of black women as they injected ideas for women's political rights into Afro-Cuban discussions of social equality, as well as ideas of racial equality into feminist discussions of citizenship. Therefore, my analysis of public political discourses that

addressed the experiences of *la mujer negra* reveals how race and gender informed the development of Cuban state formation during the 1925 to 1939 period.

CHAPTER FIVE

Enacting Citizenship: Afro-Cuban Womanhood in a New Constitutional Era

If discussions regarding the black woman highlighted the ways in which social discrimination and economic exploitation marginalized Afro-Cuban women, the matter of citizenship proved just as difficult. The period between the ratification of the 1940 Constitution and the eve of the 1959 Revolution was a time of deliberation for all Cubans. In 1939, Constitutional Assembly delegates gathered in Havana to articulate their visions for the nation's future and to help formulate a new legal system that recognized the rights of each citizen. The new Constitution, one of the most progressive documents of its time, granted full legal equality to every citizen and outlawed racial discrimination. Yet, ensuring equality would prove difficult, for granting legal rights to women and declaring discrimination illegal would not eradicate social inequalities.

This chapter examines discourses of citizenship generated during the 1940s and early 1950s from the standpoint of Afro-Cuban women. I contend that the passage of the 1940 Constitution and the close relationship between the government and labor organizations empowered Afro-Cuban women of all professions—including educators, tobacco stemmers, and domestic workers—to direct their political struggles through state institutions in order to push for legislative reform and social services during the period. Article 20 of the 1940 Constitution declared all Cubans to be "equal before the law," and deemed "illegal and punishable any discrimination on grounds of sex, race, color, or class

and any other offense to human dignity."[446] As such, Article 20 helped create an unprecedented legal foundation for addressing inequality: Cubans of color, communists, and members of labor unions could invoke their civil rights to pressure the government for labor and social welfare reform, as well as fight for protection from discrimination.

Though the relationship between the state and laboring citizens evolved as political parties fought for control, social equality and labor protection remained the prominent issues of discussion. During the presidency of Fulgencio Batista (1940–1944), the Cuban government embraced a populist approach through which activists, union leaders, and politicians united to propose new labor legislation and anti-racial discrimination laws. Organizations such as the Partido Unión Revolucionaria Comunista (Revolutionary Communist Union Party, or URC) and the Federación Nacional de Sociedades Cubanas (National Federation of Cuban Societies) used the language of civil rights to demand equal employment opportunities, fair wages, and social welfare programs for all workers. These political and social organizations also considered the success of democracy abroad as the key to the progress of Cuba's political system, and they protested war, fascism, and imperialism as threats to democratic stability. By the end of 1944, due in part to the struggling national economy, Cubans elected Ramón Grau San Martín (1944–1948) as president and shifted political power from Batista's administration and supporters to the Partido Auténticos (Auténticos Party). Political cynicism emerged as government corruption again came to characterize Cuban politics, along with the *gangsterism* and violence that persisted into the early 1950s during the

[446] Cited in Esperanza Sánchez Mastrapa, "Informe ante la Comisión de los Derechos de la Mujer" in the "El II Congreso Internacional de Mujeres" (1949). RB 24.9/92 AIH.

Auténticos presidency of Carlos Prío Socarrás (1948–1952). In 1952, Fulgencio Batista led a military coup against Prío and established his dictatorship that would last until the triumph of the 1959 Revolution.[447]

Historians have convincingly highlighted the critical shifts during 1940s: a shift in the women's movement from demanding legal reforms that included suffrage to the promotion of social welfare programs and improved labor conditions; the height of populism and the anti-racial discrimination campaign during the presidential administration of Batista (1940–1944); and government corruption and the failure of the government to ensure civil rights under the Auténtico Party rule (1944–1952), the Batista dictatorship (1952–1958), and the guerrilla warfare that led to Batista's overthrow.[448] Scholars demonstrate that the government's inability to fulfill the promises of the 1940 Constitution created resentment among the elite, middle, and laboring classes and fueled the insurrections that led to the 1959 Revolution. This chapter contributes to this existing literature by using the experiences of Afro-Cuban women as a point of entry into the processes of nation formation in this period. Similar to previous studies of the period, I emphasize the ways in which Cubans understood the government's responsibility to ensure the social welfare of the popular classes. As noted by historian Robert Whitney,

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[447] Charles D. Ameringer, *The Cuban Democratic Experience: The Autentico Years, 1944-2000* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000); Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*; Farber, *Revolution and Reaction in Cuba*; de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*.

[448] Farber, *Revolution and Reaction in Cuba*; María Antonia Marquéz Dolz, *Estado y economía en la antesala de la revolución, 1940–1952* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1994); Marifeli Pérez-Stable. *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Charles D. Ameringer, *The Cuban Democratic Experience: The Autentico Years, 1944–1952* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000); Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Frank Argote-Freyre, *Fulgencio Batista* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006).

"No longer were the fundamental issues of political discourse and practice centered around whether or not the state should be popular and national. Rather, after 1940, Cuban politics focused on what being 'popular' meant and which sectors of 'the people' were the 'true' representatives of the nation."[449] Afro-Cuban women's activism, political leadership, and writings enhances our understanding of the ways in which Cubans invoked their civil rights and understood the government's responsibility in relation to the 1940 Constitution and the national movement for social equality.

Political Alliances and Democratic Discourses

This chapter considers the ways in which Afro-Cuban women examined citizenship within periodicals, speeches, and organizational records. Cubans of all social groups understood democracy as a citizen's right to suffrage and political representation without distinction of race, class, or gender. Moreover, Afro-Cuban women's conceptualizations of citizenship supported the dominant belief that—beyond political rights and representation—the government was responsible for the wellbeing of its citizens. Black and mulatto activists and intellectuals routinely used terms such as *igualdad* (equality), *proletariado nacional* (national proletariat), *representación* (representation), *derechos* (rights), and *discriminación* (discrimination) to articulate their vision of government rule and civic duty. Similar to Afro-Cuban women activists' analyses of the black female experience that I examined during the 1930s, Afro-Cuban women's conception of citizenship after 1940 addressed racial, gender, and class struggles in varying ways.

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[449] Robert Whitney, *State and Revolution in Cuba: Mass Mobilization and Political Change, 1920–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001): 176.

Some, for instance, focused on gender oppression or labor exploitation without discussing race, while others examined civil rights within the framework of racial equality. Most emphasized the role of all women, regardless of race, in fighting for democratic reform. In addition, some of the women featured in this chapter belonged to both communist women's organizations and Afro-Cuban societies. Their connection to both groups reinforces historian Alejandro de la Fuentes's examination of the collaboration between communists and Afro-Cuban leaders in the campaign against racial discrimination. Moreover, an examination of Afro-Cuban women's understandings of citizenship and labor rights underscores the intersection of race, class, and gender ideologies.

Many black and mulatto women engaged the populist politics that characterized the early 1940s democratic discourses. By the 1930s, populist perspectives had emerged in Cuba, and the popular classes sought to define themselves as a unified constituency in the aftermath of the 1933 Revolution, and took on greater significance with the publication of the 1940 Constitution.[450] In using the term, *populism*, I employ the definition put forth by historian Alan Knight: "…a particular political *style*, characteristically involving a proclaimed rapport with 'the people,' a 'them-and-us' mentality, and (often, though not necessarily) a period of crisis and mobilization, not of which makes it exception, abnormal, 'unmediated' or irrational."[451] Knight also contends

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[450] Robert Whitney, *State and Revolution in Cuba*.

[451] *See* "Populism and Neo-populism in Latin America, Especially Mexico." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 30 (1998): 223-248. Also see, Whitney, *State and Revolution in Cuba*, 16.

that populism does not "relate to a specific ideology, period or class alliance."[452] Knight's definition allows me to pay attention to the ways in which Afro-Cuban women activists and intellectuals aligned themselves politically with the laboring classes—whether they were professionals, agrarian or factory workers, or domestic workers. Indeed, black and mulatto women activists represented themselves as members of a marginalized social group who should play an active role in bringing about equality and who merited state intervention on their behalf. As such they sought to mobilize the working classes to demand legal reforms and the creation of social welfare programs.

Examining the experiences and perspectives of Afro-Cuban women enhances our understanding of the relationship between the state and laboring citizens during the period, and it underscores how activists and union members utilized government institutions to challenge discrimination in order to gain worker protection. Central to my analysis is historian Alejandro de la Fuente's assertion that "Since the constitutional question of discrimination was defined, at least in part, as a labor question, organized labor could play a leading role in the struggle against racial discrimination. The Constitution had established a system in which only organized groups could exact benefits and concessions from the state."[453] Cubans of color recognized that organizations provided the most dependable avenue for defending their civil rights. Moreover, elected officials from all levels of government recognized that their relationship with labor unions was necessary for political success during the early 1940s. Because labor unions

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[452] Knight, "Populism and Neo-populism in Latin America, Especially Mexico."
[453] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 222. Also see, Jorge Domínguez, *Cuba: Order and Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978).

represented one of the most galvanized political constituencies, political parties sought control over unions in order to enhance their influence, and party leaders proclaimed their support for the welfare of workers and agreed that the state should take an active role in ensuring employment positions and workers' civil rights.

The majority of the women discussed in this chapter were members of communist organizations and/or labor unions. During this period, communist activists promoted workers' rights, including the right to strike, equality for women and blacks, government regulation of major industries (sugar, tobacco, railroads), and the creation of social welfare programs. Communist activists established numerous political parties in order advance their causes as citizens committed to democratic reform. In this way, Cuban communists were employing their own version of "popular front" politics.[454] The largest and most influential communist organization was the Partido Unión Revolucionaria Comunista (Revolutionary Communist Union Party, or URC). The URC—through representing one of many communist perspectives—gained its reputation and political influence as a defender of the laboring classes, especially black laborers, during the Constitutional Assembly. Recognizing that URC leaders represented only 8 percent of the voting power, they established alliances with other political groups. They joined the "'government' block" of delegates that also supported the presidential candidacy of Batista, including representatives of the Partido Liberal, Unión Nacionalista, Conjunto Nacional Democrático, and Partido Revolucionario. In developing these alliances, communists challenged each political party to address racism and clearly define their

[454] Whitney, *State and Revolution in Cuba*, 166.

stance on issues that directly affected Afro-Cubans and the laboring poor.[455] The communists' campaign for an anti-discrimination clause catapulted the party to the forefront of national politics as the party committed to the issues of the popular classes.[456] Moreover, the Communist Party's history of supporting the rights of women workers and blacks further helped draw women of color into its ranks, providing individuals such as the Afro-Cuban URC leader Esperanza Sánchez Mastrapa with opportunities to attend to the needs of marginalized populations.[457]

Many Afro-Cuban women continued to fight for their civil rights while aligning themselves with the politics of organized labor during the 1940s. During the late 1930s, the CNOC reorganized itself into the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba (Confederation of Cuban Workers, or CTC), which became the new umbrella organization for labor unions. By 1940, the CTC included an estimated 1,500 delegates who represented 576 unions throughout the island and boasted a membership of 350,000 individuals.[458] The organization worked closely with the government to address the concerns of its members, particularly during the Communist Party and Afro-Cuban societies' campaign for an anti-racial discrimination law.[459] In addition, union leaders also spoke on behalf of their members to address concerns that affected their particular

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[455] Afro-Cuban societies also helped to make these political discussions public by organizing conferences in which invited politicians spoke on topics ranging from the economy to immigration.

[456] Other political parties, such as the Autenticos, claimed acknowledgement for the passage as this clause in order to gain the support of the Afro-Cuban societies and labor unions. See de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 221.

[457] de la Fuente notes that Cubans of color constituted the majority of Communist demonstrators and Batista supporters during the early 1940s. See *A Nation for All*, 222.

[458] Perez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 211.

[459] The communists' reign lasted from 1940 up until 1947, when the Auénticos became the dominating political party.

sectors. For example, in 1946, Elvira Rodríguez, the Afro-Cuban leader of the Sindicato del Servico Doméstico (Domestic Service Union), approached the Ministry of Labor to advocate for mandatory benefits for the women of her organization.[460]

In this chapter, I maintain that Afro-Cuban women's importance to the development of national politics lay in their involvement in Afro-Cuban societies, communist organizations and civic groups, and labor unions, all of which contributed to an international dialogue regarding human rights. I draw heavily from the communist newspaper *Noticias de Hoy*, which regularly covered the activism and speeches of Afro-Cuban women activists during the period. By the 1940s, Afro-Cuban women communists employed the populist style that characterized Cuban politics as they claimed citizenship rights, demanded higher wages, and protested the war on behalf of blacks, women, and workers. Following the end of World War II, women of color joined the international women's movement for political stability and peace through institutions that included the Federación Democrática de Mujeres Cubanas (Democratic Federation of Cuban Women, or FDMC). Afro-Cuban women, many of whom were communist leaders, continued to fight for political representation and labor rights into the late 1940s and early 1950s. That the government failed to protect the rights of laboring women and blacks, and black women in particular, illustrated that citizenship and social equality remained a goal rather than a realization.

[460] "Visitan Domesticos al Dr. Carlos Azcarate." *Noticias de Hoy* 9 August 1946.

AFRO-CUBAN WOMEN COMMUNISTS IN THE NEW CONSTITUTIONAL ERA

In theory, the 1940 Constitution was supposed to be realization of the goals of the 1933 Revolution by expanding political representation and the potential for equality to all citizens. Yet implementing such groundbreaking reforms would prove difficult. For one, declaring social equality did not eradicate the material disparities that existed between Cuba's elite and poor classes. Nor did it automatically grant women full political representation or provide Cubans of color with equal access to public restaurants, parks, or beaches. Instead, many Cubans soon realized that the government lacked strong enforcement measures to successfully apply the new rights outlined in the Constitution to daily life.

By 1940, the URC had gained substantial influence among the laboring classes and poor and even some elite blacks in particular. Because of this, Batista solidified his relationship with labor organizations when he sought the support of the Communist Party during his campaign for election. After his election, he allowed the party to reorganize the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba (Confederation of Cuban Workers, or CTC), the umbrella organization for most labor unions. This established a reciprocal relationship between Batista and the communists: in exchange for mobilizing workers in support of the president, communists were able to ensure that "most of the strikes that developed in early 1940s were settled in favor of workers."[461] As a result, labor unions quickly realized that their affiliation with the CTC granted them access to government power.

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[461] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 225.

During this period, Afro-Cuban women activists developed various means of protest and legal action in their pursuit of democratic reform—one of which was to embrace populism within labor unions and communist organizations. Indeed, labor unions provided important avenues for pursuing mobility, employment opportunities, and legal reform. Women of color, for example, held leadership positions within unions and political organizations at local and national levels; supported other candidates, including those running for major political positions in Congress; raised funds to support the development of unions; and attended meetings and conferences in Cuba and abroad. From women like Concepción Núñez who sold copies of the socialist magazine *Mella* in her neighborhood of San Antonio de los Baños to elected officials like Esperanza Sánchez Mastrapa who rose to national prominence as a Congresswoman, black and mulatto women were crucial to the development of communism in Cuba.[462] As activists, union members, and communist leaders, many Afro-Cuban women utilized populist rhetoric as they presented demands on behalf of marginalized populations—including women, blacks, and the laboring poor—who were in desperate need of access to state representation and resources.

Labor and Citizenship

By the 1940s, Afro-Cuban women had made limited gains in employment since the establishment of the republic, and they continued to confront socioeconomic

[462] "Activa y entusiasta joven socialista." *Noticias de Hoy* 20 July 1947. Also see, "Aurora Santiago, Una Mujer en Cuba Agente de Periódicos, Reparta Cada dia Doscientos Ejempares." *Noticias de Hoy* 15 February 1944.

marginalization. Many women of color worked in the largest sectors of the Cuban economy that paid some of the lowest wages: agriculture and manufacturing. Sixty-five percent of all Cubans were employed in these industries and thus formed a large proletariat. The income differentials by race were lower among this group, suggesting that class played a significantly greater role in determining Afro-Cuban women's circumstances than race.[463] Thus, for many Afro-Cuban women activists, labor unions, and the Communist Party—which emphasized the rights of workers regardless of their race or gender—provided important opportunities for demanding higher wages, improved working conditions, and social services.

Importantly, race and gender simultaneously determined Afro-Cuban women opportunities for financial stability and social mobility, especially for professionals and domestic workers. Afro-Cubans in general remained underrepresented in the professions, and the dearth of women of color exemplified this reality. For example, according to the 1943 census, 68 out of 5,427 lawyers in Cuba were women of color. Afro-Cuban women compromised 39 out of 1,322 dentists, and 69 out of 1,848 nurses (compared to 1,178 white women nurses). In commerce, Afro-Cuban women held 817 out of the 146,572 positions available. Conversely, white women accounted for 7,211 of commerce workers. Only in domestic and personal service were women of color overrepresented. There existed, in fact, more Afro-Cuban women domestics (19,246 out of 73,963), than white

[463] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 153.

men, black men, or white women in the same category.[464] Afro-Cuban women, therefore, remained on the fringes of Cuba's economy due to their race, class, and gender.

Given their marginalization within employment during the 1940s, Afro-Cuban women dedicated themselves to reforming labor conditions, attaining social services, and defending their legal rights as women and blacks. In the case of women, for example, the 1940 Constitution conflicted with many laws from the colonial era that had legalized women's subordination. For example, it did guarantee women full suffrage—the government's effort to modernize society.[465] Yet, as demonstrated by historian Graciella Cruz-Taura, many of the rights granted to women "needed complementary laws, or amendments to existing legislation, to be passed in order to enter into force and take effect."[466] While some laws went into effect immediately, more than 280 existing laws, codes, and decrees contradicted the new articles or undermined others. The government, thus, needed to pass new legislation that would address these discrepancies and provide mechanisms for the state to enforce social equality. As Cruz-Taura observes, "This later process, however, was destined to drag on for years…Consequently, it was not until 1950 that the Cuban Congress finally passed the enabling legislation (20 December 1950) which made Cuban equal rights law a reality."[467]

Similar to the challenge of enforcing women's rights under the 1940 Constitution, Cubans of color recognized that the anti-discrimination articles also needed supplemental

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[464] Cuba, *Census, 1943*.
[465] Graciella Cruz-Taura, "Women's Rights and the Cuban Constitution of 1940." *Cuban Studies* 24 (1994): 123–140."
[466] Cruz-Taura, "Women's Rights and the Cuban Constitution of 1940."
[467] Cruz-Taura, "Women's Rights and the Cuban Constitution of 1940."

laws to help enforce the new legislation. In order to achieve this, they sought the establishment of laws that would not only clearly define terms such as *discrimination,* but would actually enforce the articles prohibiting racial discrimination. Some congressional representatives, such the Afro-Cuban communist and activist Salvador García Agüero, called for a specific definition of *discrimination* as "any regulation or act that prevents any citizen from gaining access to services and public places, to employment and culture in all its aspects, and to the full use of his civic and political functions."[468]According to historian Alejandro de la Fuente, García Agüero's constitutional assembly proposal defined sanctions against discrimination that would be supported by law, and it enumerated "the areas in which discrimination against Afro-Cubans was more pervasive: public spaces, work, and education…"[469] Communist Party and Afro-Cuban society leaders—many of whom belonged to both groups—joined forces to lead an anti-discrimination law campaign during the 1940s and early 1950s. Afro-Cuban women played a key role in supporting the reciprocal relationship between President Fulgencio Batista and the Communist Party, a relationship through which communists rose to new heights as an influential political actors.

While the Constitution lacked strong enforcement provisions, it did affirm that the government should promote workers' welfare and ensure employment for its citizens. As a result, workers utilized state institutions—including the courts, Congress, and the Ministry of Labor—to address their concerns regarding working conditions, salaries, and incidents of discrimination. Moreover, the Constitution created a system in which

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[468] Cited in de la Fuente, *A Nation For All*, 217.
[469] de la Fuente, *A Nation For All*, 218.

organizations became the main advocates for marginalized social groups. Individuals thus addressed their particular concerns as members of social groups connected to political parties and labor unions. In the process, many Cubans, especially laborers, articulated their rights and responsibilities as members of "the masses," or the population majority exploited by elite business owners within employment.

Afro-Cuban Women Communists and Popular Protests

Many women of color activists, such as Esperanza Sánchez Mastrapa, fought for the rights of the popular classes as communist leaders committed to legal reform during the early 1940s. While Sánchez's political career as a nationally renowned elected official made her atypical of Afro-Cuban women populists, her commitment to the rights of the laboring poor typified the interests and actions of thousands of women of color during the period. Born in the town of Gíbara in eastern Cuba, Sánchez completed high school in Santiago de Cuba. Following graduation, she moved to Havana to study pharmacy. It was during her tenure at the University of Havana that she established her "firm Marxist convictions" after meeting the communist leader Julio Antonio Mella and witnessing his struggles "for the rights of the people and for national independence."[470] She eventually returned to Gibara to pursue her profession and continue her "revolutionary struggles" throughout Oriente Province. In a 1944 interview published in *Noticias de Hoy*, Afro-Cuban communist leader and journalist Romilio Portuondo Calá stated that Sánchez maintained "a constant and active fight for the rights of the large working masses,

[470] Romilio A. Portuondo Calá. "Esperanza Sánchez Mastrapa: Una Mujer Negra en el Congreso." *Noticias de Hoy* 8 October 1944.

campesinas (women country workers) and middle classes," in addition to the "rights of the discriminated and exploited black population and all members of the popular classes."[471] Unlike many other female activists, Sánchez traversed the political boundaries that had been established through debates over racial, class, and gender inequalities and became a member of organizations that included the Unión Radical de Mujeres (Radical Women's Union, or URM), Partido Unión Revolucionaria Comunista (Revolutionary Communist Union Party, or URC)—which reorganized in 1944 as the Partido Socialista Popular (Popular Socialist Party, or PSP)—and Federación Provincial de Sociedades Negras de Oriente (Provincial Federation of the Black Societies of Oriente). As an elected URC delegate to the Constitutional Assembly of 1940—representing Oriente Province and serving as the only elected black women—she was able to bring the issues raised by these organizations before Congress.[472]

In 1939, Sánchez participated in the Third National Women's Congress. Afterwards, she continued to mobilize the popular classes on behalf of legal reform, notably as a speaker at the Provincial Assembly of Oriente Women in March 1940. The Assembly brought together women members of the URC living in the region to demonstrate that "women play[ed] a vital part in successfully carrying out the nation's objectives through progressive and democratic means."[473] As she declared in her published summary of the event, "revolutionary women, linked to the heroic working

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[471] "Esperanza Sánchez Mastrapa: Una Mujer Negra en el Congreso."

[472] de la Fuente explains that the URC "was the only party that had taken the recommendations of the National Federation of Societies of the Colored Race into the [constitutional] convention." This reinforced the image of the Communists as the most unwavering advocates for Afro-Cubans' rights. See *A Nation for All*, 221.

[473] Esperanza Sánchez Mastrapa, "Las Orientales de Pie," *Noticias de Hoy* 27 March 1940.

class" stood with the URC "at the forefront" of the movement for democratic reform. Sánchez believed that such "huge mass mobilizations" would illustrate the Party's commitment to progressive men and women. She noted that the Provincial Assembly brought together a large, visible electorate of women who implored Constitutional Assembly members to outline "clear and comprehensive constitutional requirements" that recognized the "legitimate human rights of all those exploited and discriminated against." She proclaimed that to ensure this development the women of the Provincial Assembly needed to affirm the "core liberal platform" of the URC, hoping for "a triumph" in the upcoming presidential election of Fulgencio Batista. She proudly stated that the Assembly demonstrated the URC's "deep love for the effective transformation of the social economic system."[474]

The Provincial Assembly of Women of the Oriente Region unified a range of women across racial, class, professional, and geographic differences on behalf of issues that affected the popular classes. Sánchez strategically drew from these experiences to articulate a cohesive constituency that would advocate for democratic reform. She issued the following statement regarding the women of eastern Cuba in the *Noticias de Hoy* article:

> White and black *companeras*, factory workers, and those from shops and domestic service; peasants from distant corners, tobacco fields, and sugar plantations; teachers and professionals aware of their high responsibility to their homeland have definitively united to achieve true liberation and our emancipation. They created such a unique Assembly, a heroic and revolutionary undertaking.[475]

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[474] "Las Orientales de Pie."
[475] "Las Orientales de Pie."

She asserted that, though they came from varying social perspectives, all women shared a common patriotic duty to emancipate the nation from political corruption and foreign control. She noted how, as they came together, the assembly delegates discussed relevant social issues that included equal employment opportunities for both men and women, articulating their agenda to "make reality the [URC] slogan of Democracy, Social Justice, Defense of the National Economy" and "to keep Cuba out of the Imperialist War [WWII]."[476]

As she prepared for the 1940 Constitutional Assembly in Havana, Sánchez recognized her opportunity to act on behalf of women, blacks, and the laboring poor. While outlining the four-point program for the upcoming Constitutional Assembly and presidential elections, Sánchez echoed the sentiment of many that the war presented a serious threat to national progress. Her beliefs that the war grew out of "the markets and spheres of capitalist of influence," mirrored those of anti-war activists writing during the early 1940s.[477] Rather than support a particular side, Sánchez charged the national leaders of both Ally and Axis nations with pursuing selfish aims that "strangle[d] the people," and she emphasized that the women of the Provincial Assembly desired to prevent "our fathers and brothers from marching on European ground for the greater enrichment of Wall Street and the international financial capital." In addition to announcing the Assembly delegates' stance against Cuba entering WWII, she confidently asserted that

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[476] Here, Sánchez Mastrapa refers to World War II. Cuba entered WWII on the side of the allies in December 1941. Contributors to *Noticias de Hoy* frequently cited the Communist slogan of "Democracy, Social Justice, Defense of the National Economy and keeping Cuba out of the Imperialist War" in articles published during the early 1940s.

[477] "Las Orientales de Pie," *Noticias de Hoy* 27 March 1940.

the event marked "the effective consolidation of women's work, incorporating within [the Communist Party] thousands of fellow workers and peasants who belonged to other parties." She concluded the article by avowing the commitment of Oriente women to "the struggle for reclaimed rights with unmatched persistence" for national progress.[478]

Sánchez's concern for the popular classes emerged from her commitment to achieving racial and gender equality. She therefore devoted substantial energy to the growth of the URC, which was reorganized in 1944 as the Partido Socialista Popular (Popular Socialist Party, or PSP). She promoted the organization as "the genuine defender of the popular masses."[479] In a 1944 interview published in *Noticias de Hoy*, she proudly stated that there existed no racial or sexual discrimination within the organization. Furthermore, she claimed, the PSP fought for the "absolute equality of women and men, the constant battle to achieve, in practice, the realization of this right and equality," as well as the "abolition of racial discrimination." She not only critiqued political factions that she believed supported the exploitation of the popular classes, but she asserted that the PSP was "the only party that loyally defends [popular class] economic and social interests."[480] Sánchez contrasted her depiction of the socially egalitarian PSP with the sexism embedded in Cuba's larger political system. Specifically, she noted that women historically lacked representation at all levels of government.[481]

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[478] "Las Orientales de Pie."
[479] "Las Orientales de Pie."
[480] Romilio A. Portuondo Calá. "Esperanza Sánchez Mastrapa: Una Mujer Negra en el Congreso," *Noticias de Hoy* 8 October 1944.
[481] Women were not elected to Congress until 1936 and, even after women gained new rights following the Machado regime, less than fifteen had served as representatives by 1944.

In 1944, Sánchez was elected to the House of Representatives (1944-1950) and was able to use her position in to demand worker's rights and contest racial discrimination. Sánchez declared her goal to change the political culture by advocating for complementary constitutional laws that would enforce civil rights, promoting economic justice through new "Lease and Partnership Contracts," and enforcing anti-discrimination laws and social security programs.[482] Whether people found her characterizations inspiring or just more political rhetoric, Esperanza Sánchez Mastrapa's populist views were certainly timely: Her rise to prominence came at a moment when the Communist Party reached its peak as an influential political force that informed gendered and racialized democratic discourses during the early 1940s.

Nationalist discourses were both gendered and racialized during the peak of Cuban populism and communist influence, and an overwhelming amount of these discourses emphasized the rights of women and blacks as part of the "national proletariat" or "masses." In addition, due to the promises of the Cuban Constitution to provide equal rights, communists' emphasis on women's and blacks' rights were often to gain political representation and affirm their legal rights rather than to challenge the government's power. Protests initiated by women and reported in *Noticias de Hoy* reflect this strategy. In March 1940, for example, Delicia Meneses Pérez of Santa Clara insisted in a letter to the editor that "Most of our people have many things to complain about. Discriminated blacks, who effectively helped to shake Spanish domination, are today ignored because their skin has a distinct color from whites. Women have always been

[482] "Esperanza Sánchez Mastrapa: Una Mujer Negra en el Congreso."

regarded as slaves, although their slavery has been invested with a false freedom, and so much more…"[483] Meneses called for a socialist democratic government, which he believed would "put an end" to U.S. imperial exploitation and instead ensure political and social equality for peasants, blacks, and women. Newspaper contributor Diego Gonzáles Martín and communist activist Consuelo Silveira took their analyses a step further to argue that the elimination of racial and gender discrimination was necessary for the "general improvement of the nation."[484] Cuban women of color could not be truly liberated, the authors contended, until the nation eradicated all forms of social inequality.

As specific concerns and local exigencies compelled marginalized Cubans to pursue reform through state institutions, women of color activists challenged political corruption and promoted popular representation at varying levels of government. For example, during the early 1940s, Afro-Cuban activist Teresa García rose to national prominence as a leader of Havana's tobacco stemmers union when she served as Propaganda Secretary of the Executive Committee of Cuba's umbrella labor organization, the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba (Confederation of Cuban Workers, or CTC). During the fall of 1941, García challenged corruption within the Central Board of Health, which, following accusations of embezzlement, sparked a "national scandal" and motivated many workers of Havana Province to question the state's commitment to working people. As García explained to *Noticias de Hoy* reporters, the Central Board of Health had "arbitrarily" been withholding Workers' Maternity

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[483] *Noticias de Hoy* 17 March 1940.
[484] "Todos somos iguales ante el ley. Pero…," *Noticias de Hoy* 21 April 1940; "Las Mujeres de URC en Accion," *Noticias de Hoy* 24 March 1940.

Insurance checks—an insurance fund created to cover healthcare expenses for working mothers and male workers' wives—in order to cover the large expenses incurred in the construction of the Provincial Maternity Clinic. García noted that she initially lauded the government's decision to construct a Provincial Maternity Clinic that would make medical care more accessible for expecting mothers throughout the region. However, she soon became concerned with the process of its production, and she approached the organization's office to protest practices that had occurred during the construction of the clinic. She asserted that the Central Board of Health had adopted an "aggressive" attitude "against the interests of the workers."[485]

García employed a gendered analysis of government corruption that highlighted the ways in which the Central Board of Health had ignored the rights of workers and their families to receive healthcare benefits. She believed that if the organization had the intension of building a facility for workers and their families, they should have taken into account the needs of the popular classes as they developed a spending budget. Instead, she claimed that the Central Board of Health had created a "useless bureaucracy," including a director, sub-director, and clinic administrator who drained workers' funds in order to cover their salaries. García complained, "It is a shame that workers' money be wasted so outrageously." [486] García adamantly confirmed that the "national proletariat" energetically and strongly opposed the "immorality" and "pretension" of removing the

[485] "Son Retenidos los Donativos de Maternidad," *Noticias de Hoy* 4 October 1941.
[486] "Son Retenidos los Donativos de Maternidad."

funds set aside for workers. She also requested that the budget of the Provincial Maternity Clinic be made public.[487]

At the heart of her complaint was the lack of transparency and popular representation within state institutions. For García, working women and their families—who would eventually patronize the maternity clinic—should have a voice in the construction of the building and its healthcare system. Workers' input was especially important to García since labor organizations initially identified the need for such a facility. Additionally, García contended that the building should benefit the people without taking money from the health insurance funds that had been created to support the poor—especially for the benefit of middle-class administrators. Finally, she spoke on behalf of the "national proletariat" and identified this group as a unified constituency of laborers who demanded political representation. Outraged, she concluded that "Given the gravity of the situation that threatens the Workers' Maternity Insurance," neither "workers nor women workers can remain indifferent."[488] While it is unclear if her campaign against the Central Board of Health succeeded, the protest furthered García's activism on behalf of women of the tobacco industry.

Two years later, she organized a region-wide campaign to increase salaries for tobacco workers. García—then General Secretary of the Tobacco Worker's Union Executive Committee—presented a "brilliant speech" before a special assembly held by the Union. Though newspaper reports did not publish her actual speech, a *Noticias de Hoy* contributor later compared her address to those given by such "famous fighters" as

[487] "Son Retenidos los Donativos de Maternidad."
[488] "Son Retenidos los Donativos de Maternidad."

prominent labor leaders Julia Rodriguez, Ramona Vargas, Inocencia Valdés, and Evelia Somonte.[489] During her speech, García informed the assembly attendees that recent salary reductions had affected more than 15,000 tobacco workers living throughout the country.[490] She noted that this fact, coupled with increased living expenses and the increasing demand of tobacco and higher tobacco prices, made an organized protest for higher wages a logical decision. Following her speech, the 700 union members in attendance deliberated and agreed to fight for a 50 percent raise. At the conclusion of the special assembly, the union delegates approved to create a "resistance fund" that would help to ensure the "proper oversight of laws" affecting working conditions and workers' wages.[491] The women's campaign for increased wages proved relatively successful. Shortly after the assembly, García and CTC head Lazaro Peña met with Labor Minister Dr. Suárez Rivas and negotiated a 25 percent increase for all tobacco stemmers.[492]

While challenging government corruption was not always effective during the early 1940s, organized demonstrations against decreasing wages and social welfare program cuts actually gained a measure of popularity among numerous social leaders, many of whom included Afro-Cuban women as working wives and mothers. This can be explained in part by changing political and economic factors. First, Cuba recovered from the economic stagnation of the 1930s and then experienced an economic boom towards the end of World War II. However, poor government management meant that funds were

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489 "Solicitan Aumentos las Despalilladoras," *Noticias de Hoy* 1 April 1943.
490 "Solicitan Aumentos las Despalilladoras."
491 "Solicitan Aumentos las Despalilladoras."
492 "Obtienen las Despalilladoras de Toda la República Aumento de 25% en sus Jornales," *Noticias de Hoy* 18 April 1943. Also see, "Declaraciones Sobre el Aumento de Salarios a Despalilladoras" *Noticias de Hoy* 20 April 1943.

not invested into building a solid infrastructure to support future growth. Second, as labor union leaders used their affiliation with the PSP as political leverage, they were able to garner national attention for local issues affecting workers across the island. In return, the PSP was able to position itself as the authentic representative of the popular classes.[493]

Economic Reform and Anti-War Protests

Cuba's economy experienced a brief boom as sugar prices rose during WWII. Batista utilized this bit of prosperity to expand public works programs, as well as government bureaucracy. However, not all sectors of the economy benefitted; some suffered greatly. Because restrictions in overseas trade and shipping occurred due to the war, Cuban exports to Europe declined and shortages frequently took place. Agricultural producers and cigar factory owners lost their European markets, and many factory owners closed their doors. As many economic segments waned, the costs of products—ranging from food to household products—skyrocketed. Some taxes were raised and new ones were implemented. In light of these events, Cubans, particularly the laboring poor, struggled to find employment and feed their families.[494]

Afro-Cuban communist leader Consuelo Silveira responded to the current employment crisis when she called for national economic development on behalf of working women and their families. In December 1942, Silveira gathered with prominent women activists from across the island at the Amas de Casa Conference (Housewives Conference) to address the ways in which "speculation and profiteering" had affected the

[493] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 222-243; Domínguez, *Cuba: Order and Revolution*.
[494] Perez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 215-16.

lives of the laboring classes since the beginning of World War II. Sponsored by the Asociación Pro-Enseñanza Popular de la Mujer (Association for Women's Popular Education) the event contributed to the organizations' mission to defend the "genuine interests of the popular classes, particularly those concerning women."[495] The Conference began at nine o'clock on a Sunday morning at the prominent Campoamor Theater in Havana. *Noticias de Hoy* reported that the event opened with all of the 800 delegates—among them, CTC representative Teresa García and communist feminist Ofelia Domínguez Navarro of Santa Clara—singing the national hymn. The conference aired over the national radio stations "Radioemisoras coco" and the "CMX Casa Lavía."[496]

Silveira, considered "one of the most outstanding leaders" of the Asociación Pro-Enseñanza, delivered the keynote address, which focused on reclaiming Cuba's government for the benefit of the masses.[497] Concerned with the ways in which the national economy had shifted since Cuba entered World War II in December 1941, she argued that "speculators and jobbers, who accumulate their plunder by inflating prices, throw their load on the backs of the people, place the blame [for high prices] on the war, and assert that Cuban product costs have been raised in the same way as foreigner products." Silveira asserted that the assembly attendees could not continue to live "without taking measures to ensure a better life for the masses" and must fight to protect the masses from capitalist exploitation. She contended that the government should work

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[495] "Llamamiento a Todas las Amas de Casa Para una Accion Unida Contra los Especuladores," *Noticias de Hoy* 5 March 1943.
[496] "Una asamblea de mujeres velara por el cumplimiento de las Leyes Contra la Especulacion y el Agio," *Noticias de Hoy* 29 December 1942.
[497] "Una asamblea de mujeres velara por el cumplimiento de las Leyes Contra la Especulacion y el Agio."

to ensure domestic supply of food and other consumer goods, replacing the high number of imported products through "an industrial plan that meets the needs of the country." The government, she believed, should diversify agriculture by cultivating "root vegetables, beans and other essential items of consumption." Finally, she claimed that the state should defend "to the maximum" workers' wages and prevent employers from slashing or freezing wages. Doing such, the government would "ensure the standard of living in accordance with the obligations and sacrifices that war imposes."[498]

Similar to the sentiments of Esperanza Sánchez Mastrapa two years earlier, Silveira incorporated an anti-war critique that highlighted the political corruption that threatened Cuba's economy. In addition, Silveira proposed a set of ways through which she believed the government would be best able to bring about the development of the domestic economy. She declared on behalf of the assembly attendees:

> We work, therefore, relentlessly to ensure our national defense, going to the richness of our own soil, to find the elements that allow us to ensure domestic supplies from its own resources, we work tirelessly for the diversification of agricultural products; fight so that capital accumulation may be put at the service of the nation and the big capitalists contribute not just with a little effort while working people are giving everything in the effort to win the war.[499]

Silveira proposed that the government create facilities for developing the domestic economy through social programs. Her speech served as part of an ongoing campaign through which she protested Cuba's entry into WWII during the previous year—she had given a similar address the previous month at the

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[498] "Una asamblea de mujeres velara por el cumplimiento de las Leyes Contra la Especulacion y el Agio."
[499] "Una asamblea de mujeres velara por el cumplimiento de las Leyes Contra la Especulacion y el Agio."

Asociación Pro-Ensenanza Popular de la Mujer event held in honor labor activist Inocencia Valdes.[500]

Silveira's assembly address reinforced the belief that Cuba's economy needed to be reformed in order to protect the wellbeing of the masses. She declared that a basic quality of life—including the availability of food and the protection of wages—was a fundamental right that the government must ensure. The very language of her populist rhetoric, as well of that of Sánchez and Garíca, underscored that racial, class, and gender equality lay at the heart of citizenship for many individuals. Her speeches and activism helped fuel a larger anti-war campaign among women labor activists. In January 1943, the Amas de Casa organization announced an official campaign against "profiteering and speculation."[501]

Activists and workers, whose speeches and writings appeared in *Noticias de Hoy,* not only highlighted social inequalities as a reason to pursue democratic reform, they also believed that their role in social and systemic change to be their patriotic duty. Afro-Cuban women featured in the daily newspaper also linked their domestic concerns to international problems, including the war, imperialism, and fascism. Notably, the overwhelming majority of these articles—or other articles that referenced them—focused on class issues, or the concerns of "the masses." Indeed, Afro-Cuban women communists sought to integrate other women into their political organizations as members of the popular classes without promoting racial unity. Therefore, while Sánchez stood against

[500] "La mujer frente a la guerra." *Noticias de Hoy* 13 October 1942.
[501] "Se Anuncia una Gran Campana de 'Amas de Casa.'" 5 January 1943.

racial and gender discrimination and declared the PSP's commitment to terminating racial and gender discrimination, she rarely addressed the particular experiences of black and mulatto women. However, it is important to keep at least two points in mind. First, as leaders of the PSP, each activist promoted the unification of all women, despite their acknowledged differing social experiences. In essence, Afro-Cuban women communists and labor union leaders shifted the national discourse of social equality and unity to bring together all women under the category of "the masses" or "national proletariat." Second, these communist leaders continued to defend the community of color in their struggles for democratic reform by belonging to Afro-Cuban societies, the Communist Party, women's organizations, and labor unions.

Afro-Cuban women's articulation of populist discourses complicates our understanding of how communism and citizenship were informed by race, gender, and class by highlighting the ways in which communist and labor leaders sought to politicize a working class identity in relation to the 1940 Constitution. These organizers asserted that the government was responsible for protecting the rights of its laboring citizens. During this transformative period, activists ran for public office in order to bring to light the issues affecting those who were most vulnerable to capitalist exploitation—those with limited political representation who faced fluctuating salaries and housing costs, poor working conditions, and limited social welfare programs. During the period that *Noticias de Hoy* was published (1938–1950), its contributors used populist perspectives as a means to inform and mobilize a sizeable percentage of the laboring poor and leftist activists into a communist organization. Whether through persistent organizing, the

effects of World War II, or President Batista's populism—or any combination of the three—thousands of Cubans became galvanized around the cause of rights for the masses between 1940 and 1944. By the mid 1940s, the close relationship between the government and labor organizations had irrevocably affected national politics, and subsequent administrations were forced to acknowledge the civil rights of the masses.

The end of Batista's presidential administration and World War II marked a shift in Cuba's political culture, as the rise of the Auténtico Party to political power, led by President Ramón San Grau Martín, and the rise of the Cold War diminished the influence that communists held in national politics. Batista's Prime Minister Carlos Saladrigas lost to Grau during the 1944 elections, with Grau nostalgically reflecting on his 100-day presidency during the Provisional Government period to assert that he was the most qualified candidate. Cubans hoped that with the reinstatement of Grau the nation would enter another age of prosperity. However, both Grau and his successor Carlos Prio Socarras (1948–52) would fail to meet Cubans' expectations. Government corruption came to characterize both administrations. Cubans became cynical towards government as *gangsterism* took over the political operations—an era defined by violence and terror and government embezzlement. In addition, the influence of the PSP waned as the government targeted communist activists during the late 1940s. In 1947, the PSP lost control of the CTC to the Auténticos. Despite the waning of the Communist Party, many women expanded their political ground during this period to focus more broadly on democratic reform, participating in international women's conferences that promoted education, women's legal equality, and international peace.

CONNECTING LOCAL ISSUES TO GLOBAL STRUGGLES AFTER WWII

There is little coincidence that global perspectives on legal reform became popular within Afro-Cuban women activists's discourses of citizenship during the 1940s and 1950s. The communist movement, World War II, and accessibility of international travel due to technological advancements transformed various aspects of Cuban politics and connected women of color to broader movements for equality that traversed national boundaries.[502] While Afro-Cuban women were certainly involved in international movements during the nationalist struggles of the nineteenth century and the feminist struggles of the early twentieth century, organizations established during the 1940s—such as the Federación Democrática de Mujeres Cubanas (Cuban Women's Democratic Federation, or FDMC) and the Federación Democrática de Mujeres Internacionales (Women's International Democratic Federation, or FDMI)—connected struggles against gender discrimination with democratic reform by mobilizing a younger generation of women committed to full equality between women and men. Newspapers such as *Mujeres Cubanas* and *Noticias de Hoy*, in addition to speeches from international labor and women's conferences, promoted government reform and civic responsibility as reform-minded leaders argued that international events including fascism, social discrimination, and war threatened Cuba's national security. Women's congresses held in cities ranging from Havana and Paris to Budapest and Copenhagen during the late 1940s and early 1950s coincided with the rise of the Cold War. Furthermore, since the majority of women living throughout the world had achieved suffrage by 1945, more women were voting and, thus, able to

[502] For example, see, Guridy, *Forging Diaspora*: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010): 151-194.

participate in the democratic system in new ways. Afro-Cuban women articulated citizenship rights, civic duties, and government responsibility in relation to international discussions of citizenship and movements for reform.

The Democratic Cuban Women's Federation

During the 1945 International Women's Congress in Paris, a multi-national group of women established the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF). Concerned with the impact of World War II on the living conditions of many throughout the world, founders of the WIDF aimed to prevent future wars or the resurgence of fascism, and they critiqued international conflict as a war that threatened the security of women and children. Women established national branches of the WIDF in various countries during subsequent years. In 1948, communist activists Edith García Buchaca (who was white), Esperanza Sánchez Mastrapa, and María I. Argüelles were among a group of women who established the Federación Democrática de Mujeres Cubanas (Democratic Cuban Women's Federation, or FDMC), a branch of the WIDF in Cuba. García and her peers utilized the organization to help bridge Cuban women's political interests and activism with international developments. As they explained in a published call to all Cuban women: "The Cuban woman lives in a moment of grave national concern and notes with deep restlessness the threatening international events."[503] Calling for a "popular and democratic movement" committed to equality and the "defense of our democracy and independence," the leaders utilized their connections to the Communist

[503] "Llamamiento de la FDMC."

Party to mobilize laboring women living throughout the island. They asserted that the FDMC would help address issues that had not yet been resolved since the ratification of the 1940 Constitution:

> After long and difficult struggles in close liaison with the progressive forces of the country, Cuban women have conquered many of the rights for which women of other nation are still fighting for: the electoral vote, the constitutional right to receive equal pay for equal work, working mother's rights, etc. […] Yet the full equality to which the Cuban woman had always aspired has not yet been achieved.[504]

They thus called upon Cuban women to "coordinate our activities with women from around the world, British or Soviet, American or Chinese, Yugoslav, Greek, Italian, French, Spanish, Latin American." By uniting with women across the world, FDMC leader sought to prevent the world from reverting to the bloodshed "that brought our sons and brothers into an unnecessary war, only to meet the economic appetites of financial tycoons."[505]

The FDMC became an important force in organizing liberal and radical women activists during the late 1940s and early 1950s. It not only founded branches throughout the island, it also created the publication *Mujeres Cubanas* through which the organization advertised and disseminated information regarding the global women's movement. *Mujeres Cubanas* articles demonstrate that FDMC members maintained an international vision of democratic reform and established solidarity with other women and children of the world by attending peace rallies and conferences. FDMC delegations also held national conferences in defense of children, where they emphasized issues that

[504] "Llamamiento de la FDMC."
[505] "Llamamiento de la FDMC."

included youth education, health, and the quality of their living environments. Throughout the organization's tenure, FDMC members maintained their commitment to obtaining a "Woman's Equalization Law" that would establish enforcement provisions for cases of discrimination against women. FDMC leaders declared in a 1951 *Mujeres Cubanas* article:

> Our organization, which fights for the advancement of women, supports all initiatives through which they might claim her their equal rights granted by the Constitution of the Republic. That is why, although we believe that this project is not yet comprehensive and complete enough to pull down all the absurd prescriptions of the Civil Code as it stands, it represents, without a doubt, an appreciable step towards advancement, which is why it has our full support and sympathy.[506]

The article went on to state, "We Cuban women are closely following the discussions that are taking place in this legislative session regarding this matter, and naturally feel profound repulsion by those who oppose that which we have already been granted in the established [1940] Constitution." FDMC leaders saw themselves as advocates for both social reform and the recognition of women's full legal rights. They concluded the articles by issuing a hopeful message to Congress: "We are certain, however, that the spirit of democracy that brought the representatives to their positions, in which many supported women's suffrage, ultimately prevails in that women's proposed equal rights shall be approved."[507] Thus, women of the FDMC created a broad platform in which they fought on behalf of democratic reform at home and abroad.

For instance, when FDMC leader Esperanza Sánchez Mastrapa had served as a delegate of the 1940 Constitutional Assembly, she believed that "The Constitutional

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[506] "Una Carta," *Mujeres Cubanas* (1:6) January 1951
[507] "Una Carta."

Assembly, if it fulfills its function and commitment to the masses of people," will "remove all of the defects present in the inferior colonial codes that undermine our civil rights."[508] Eight years later, she addressed the Second International Women's Congress in Budapest, which was organized by the Federación Democrática Internacional de Mujeres (Women's International Democratic Federation, or FDIM). Nearly 400 delegates from 35 countries and every continent joined together to discuss "the most grave problems that affect humanity and women in particular in this hour of the world."[509] During her speech, Sánchez issued a critical message for those who viewed Cuba as a progressive, democratic state. Despite the fact that the Constitution contained "multiple provisions and undeniable progress and justice" for women to "exercise political and civil rights," she claimed the colonial-era civil codes, which placed women under the guardianship of a male patriarch and denied them legal rights, contradicted the recent text and, thus, undermined women's equality.[510] Representing the FDMC at the Congress, she explained, "All our civil law is the hallmark of monarchical conservatism that implanted it on the island, and for the purpose of this legislation—a clear reflection of the times—the woman is a man's property and must act as such." She argued that, to address this discrepancy, "Women presently move against these [colonial legal codes] that, in practice, invalidate our achievements in the first State Law," feeling "the same impulse that led to our demands for a Constitutional Assembly..." Although, in many ways, Sánchez had overcome gender discrimination in her political and professional endeavors,

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[508] Experanza Sánchez Mastrapa. "La constituyente y el ocho de marzo." *Noticias de Hoy* 8 March 1940.
[509] "La constituyente y el ocho de marzo."
[510] Esperanza Sánchez Mastrapa. "Informe ante la Comisión de los Derechos de la Mujer" in the "El II Congreso Internacional de Mujeres" (1949). RB 24.9/92 AIH.

her leadership experiences gave her insight into the perils of which she spoke. Sánchez was on a mission motivated, in part, by anxiety over citizenship rights: "As is characteristic of a capitalist democracy, equality in practice is limited by the prejudices and inferiority maintained and cultivated by the dominant social political regime in our countries."[511] She contended that marriage, labor exploitation, and racism maintained women's social marginalization. As she evaluated the history of women within Cuba's political system, the communist leader was resolute in her conviction that the state must address the discrepancy in women's rights established by the colonial codes and the 1940 Constitution in order to ensure women's full citizenship.

Sánchez's speech before the Second International Women's Congress incorporated a gendered, socioeconomic, and racial understanding of Cuban citizenship that highlighted the "triple discrimination" faced by women of color.[512] Sánchez made it clear that racial prejudices, "extended and sustained by the dominant classes," maintained "the opprobrious conditions for thousands of black and mulatto women." As she poignantly highlighted, "Dark-skinned women, identified as black or *mulata*, also suffer from disadvantages because they are women. Yet complete parity [between black and white women] does not exist in our country due to their skin color. If [black women] are also workers, they suffer a triple discrimination."[513] Black and mulatto women, like their male counterparts, continued to be denied employment in stores, offices, nursing, and state employment. Though Cuban law prohibited racial discrimination, Sánchez claimed

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511 "Informe ante la Comisión de los Derechos de la Mujer"
512 "El II Congreso Internacional de Mujeres" (1949). AIH RB 24.9/92.
513 "El II Congreso Internacional de Mujeres."

that employers continued to not hire those "struck by the color of their skin." She lamented that, even as the Constitution established equality among all Cubans, "many possibilities for progress" were "closed" for black and mulatto women.[514]

Though it was only one of several speeches presented at the Second WIDF Conference, Sánchez's presentation allows us to examine the ways in which Cuban women of color examined national issues in relation to international struggles for gender equality. She highlighted how the 1940 Constitution, though progressive when compared to other nations, still failed to bring about gender equality. More importantly, she underscored the need to overcome racial and class discrimination in order to achieve full equality. Thus, she stressed the intersection of race, gender, and class in defining the experiences of women—identity markers that produced a heterogeneous understanding of womanhood. Finally, Sánchez examined the plight of black and mulatto women within a nationalist framework before an international audience, making visible a community of women who were rarely examined in relation to Cuba's national identity apart from stereotypical representations of Afro-Cuban women within popular culture.

NUEVOS RUMBOS (NEW DIRECTIONS) AND THE STRUGGLE FOR CITIZENSHIP

Afro-Cuban activists understood that the government needed to enforce racial equality in order to protect their rights within a democratic society. To accomplish this goal, society men and women worked with communists to campaign for the passage of an anti-

[514] Esperanza Sánchez Mastrapa. "Informe ante la Comisión de los Derechos de la Mujer" in the "El II Congreso Internacional de Mujeres" (1949). AIH RB 24.9/92.

discrimination law throughout the 1940s. As noted, the communist-controlled CTC became the main organization to address blacks' and mulattos' concerns and advocate for racial equality during the Constitutional Assembly, solidifying the alliance between communist party leaders and Afro-Cuban society affiliates. Many society members served as prominent communist leaders, including House Representatives Lazaro Peña (also an executive leader of the CTC), Salvador García Agüero, Blas Roca, and Jesús Menéndez Larrondo. The Communist Party also placed its Afro-Cuban members in societies throughout the island. García Agüero, for example, was one of the executive committee members of the Afro-Cuban society umbrella organization, the Federación Nacional de Sociedades Cubanas (National Federation of Cuban Societies). As the influence of the communist waned after 1947, many Federación associates emerged as high-ranking leaders of the Auténticos Party, and they continued to use their positions to fight for an anti-discrimination law.[515]

Whether they belonged to the Communist or Auténtico Party, or another political organization altogether, members of Afro-Cuban societies mobilized to create a "United Front" and defend their concerns as a population that continued to experience discrimination within work and public places. Black and mulatto associations created the Federación Nacional de Sociedades Cubanas to help sustain this effort. These organizations held provincial conventions and national conferences in regions that included Havana, Camaguey, and Santiago de Cuba. Following the 1944 National Convention of Black Cuban Societies, society members announced the creation of the

[515] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 224–230.

"United Front" that would contribute to "national unity and the fight against Nazism" and fight "for the defense of the civil rights of the black population and the wellbeing of the Cuban people."[516] Society members thus outlined an agenda for democratic reform that affirmed nationalist political goals to ensure political rights—black as well as Cubans in general—in addition to international struggles against fascism.[517]

For all the support that they garnered by the early 1940s, communist and international women's organizations were but one means through which matters pertaining to gender, class, and race informed democratic discourses. The columns of *Noticias de Hoy* and the PSP's political program steadily addressed gender issues in addition to labor reform as affiliates—ranging from rank and file members to prominent leaders—evaluated the political system in terms of citizenship, government authority, and international struggles for peace and equality. Because women's rights were also debated within the community of color, Afro-Cuban publications such as *Nuevos Rumbos* (1945–1948, 1959) and *Oriente* (1951–1957) incorporated a gendered analysis of racial discrimination and social equality. Therefore, the rhetoric of citizenship must consider the gendered and racialized implications of writings published in the Afro-Cuban press in addition to communist women's articles and speeches. Understanding both the gendered and racial politics of citizenship within the Afro-Cuban periodicals and organizations also entails highlighting women's engagement within each circle, and it particularly requires close consideration of the positions open to women of the communities.

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[516] "Citan a una Gran Reunión Nacional de Sociedades Negras," *Noticias de Hoy* 10 March 1944.
[517] See also, "Intensifican las Sociedades Negras de Las Villas sus Labores Contra el Nazi-Fascismo," *Noticias de Hoy* 28 January 1943.

Women's Political Representation and Civil Rights within Afro-Cuban Publications

Six years after the publication of the 1940 Constitution, Afro-Cuban *Nuevos Rumbos* contributor Dr. Juana Oliva Bulnes displayed no small amount of angst when she observed that Cuban women lacked delegates in the House of Representatives who would "fight" on their behalf for the "achievement of full social equality."[518] Only one woman, Adelaida Oliva Robaina, had been elected in 1944 to the House of Representatives from the Havana province in which Oliva Bulnes resided. In her article "En Torno al Momento Político" ("Due to the Political Moment"), Oliva Bulnes sought to examine the role of women in Cuba's current political system. Oliva Bulnes explained that, though the Constitution "favor[ed]" women in many regards, "collective weakness" undermined their potential to exercise political power. Without a unified effort, she worried that Oliva Robaina's courage or "noble determination" to rebuild the nation would go in vain, her "work for the common good […] reduced to the extent permitted by her personal resources." She insisted that Oliva Robaina "fought with courage—putting forth a noble effort—but, for lack of breath, her good work will be reduced to the extent permitted by her personal resources because the public spirit, uninterested in cooperation, turned its back when she took it upon herself to acquire a position as a preeminent representative that would enable her to make viable, through legal means, the well-intentioned purpose of public service involved in her initiative of social cooperation."[519] Although she acknowledged the triumphs of many Cuban women—regardless of race—since the establishment of the republic, Oliva Bulnes was concerned by the lack of political

[518] Dra. Juana Oliva Bulnes, "En Torno al Momento Política" *Nuevos Rumbos* December 1946.
[519] "En Torno al Momento Política."

influence afforded to women of contemporary society. This was particularly important during a time in which "collective immorality" defined the government. As she noted, "few remain in the national political movement—perhaps being fearful victims—and passively contemplate the collapse of such a respectable institution."[520]

While this concern weighed heavily on her mind, it hardly prevented her from issuing a hopeful message. For her part, Oliva Bulnes took pains to ensure that the article motivated readers to realize their aptitude to transform society for the greater good of humanity. Though writing for the primarily Afro-Cuban readership of *Nuevos Rumbos*, she appealed broadly to all Cuban women, suggesting that, "by design," they held the "potentiality" to build a better and more just nation. She encouragingly wrote, "it is from you all who our society can expect a happy renewed commitment [to national progress]."[521] Oliva Bulnes wished for a time in which the country's "joys and sorrows" might "wander on Cuban soil" without "discord generated by selfish impulses." Someday, she hoped, men and women would live as "brothers traveling on the rough road of life, joining hearts to carry our noble objective of the fraternity of the species."[522] She thus incorporated a gendered perspective of national progress that positioned women alongside their male companions.

Similar to their male counterparts, Afro-Cuban women leaders pursued democratic reform by utilizing a range of philosophies as communist activists, labor union leaders, and liberal and conservative political affiliates. Gender—in addition to

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[520] "En Torno al Momento Política."
[521] "En Torno al Momento Política."
[522] "En Torno al Momento Política."

race and class—affected larger questions of equality and citizenship. With women's rights being tantamount to the success of Cuba's legal system in terms of political representation and social parity for laboring women and their families, gender equality became a matter of concern for a variety of political factions. As explained by scholar Johanna I. Moya Fábregas: "Leftist publications such as *Hoy* and *Mujeres Cubanas* challenged traditional women's roles by advocating for their involvement in collective struggles. Yet, similar to mainstream publications such as *Bohemia*, *Vanidades*, *El Mundo*, *Carteles*, and *Prensa Libre*, leftist magazines did assume that motherhood and marriage were women's primary responsibilities."[523] Similarly, Afro-Cuban newspapers and magazines suggested women's innate role as mothers and wives. While individual concerns varied for different professions, over time gender remained an underlying theme within the broader discussion of discrimination for Afro-Cuban women, children, and men living during the 1940s and 1950s.[524]

Afro-Cuban women articulated their gender and racial identification within this milieu of binary gender roles. As demonstrated by Oliva Bulnes' articles on women and national politics, black and mulatto women frequently entered public debates on reform by addressing issues that directly affected the domestic sphere—such as women's political representation, wages and employment opportunities, maternity rights, food availability, and child labor. Cuban women of color also experienced greater

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523 "En Torno al Momento Política."

524 For discussions of the women's movement during the 1940s and 1950s, see, Julio Cesar González Pagés, *En busca de un espacio: historia de mujeres en Cuba* (La Habana: Ediciones de Ciencias Sociales, 2003); Esperanza Méndez Oliva, La estirpe de Mariana en Las Villas (Santa Clara, Cuba: Editorial Capiro, 2006); Esperanza Méndez Oliva and Santiago Alemán Santana, Villareñas camino a la emancipación (Havana: Editora Política, 2008).

opportunities for leadership within Afro-Cuban societies; by the early 1940s, several associations had elected women to their executive boards. At a 1946 Convention of Black Societies held in Camagüey, delegates advocated that women be fully incorporated into social organizations as participants "and not regarded only as club ornaments or as instruments of propaganda."[525] Soon, many women held leadership roles in multiple organizations. For example, during the 1940s, Felicita Ortiz, vice-president of the Afro-Cuban society La Victoria of Camagüey, became a prominent communist leader within the region. Esperanza Sánchez Mastrapa served as an active member of the Federation of Societies of Color of Oriente Province at the same time that she fought for social equality within the national Communist Party. And university professor Ana Echegoyen Cañizares played a major role in the development of Havana's educational system—advocating for equal opportunities to quality schooling during her travels to international conferences—in addition to her work with the Afro-Cuban women's organization Asociación Cultural Femenina (Women's Cultural Association, or ACF). In certain critical regards, evolving perspectives on women's roles within the sociopolitical and cultural life of the community of color reflected national transformations—developments in which women were making persistent gains as political agents.

Afro-Cuban publications such as *Nuevos Rumbos* provided arenas through which Afro-Cubans could actively evaluate citizenship, allowing magazines' contributors to help create gendered and racialized perspectives of democratic reform. Some authors believed that racial discrimination within schools demonstrated the failure of democratic

[525] *Memoria de los trabajos realizados por la Quinta Convencion Provincial de Sociedades de Camaguey en la Sociedad* (1947).

institutions to provide equal educational opportunities throughout the Americas, therefore serving as a violation of human rights against black, Jewish, and indigenous populations.[526] Others criticized the Jim Crow system and incidents of racism that occurred in the United States, such as public institutions denying black tourists entry to hotels.[527] Overall, both writers and readers of *Nuevos Rumbos* firmly evaluated citizenship in relation to the experiences of Afro-Cubans, as well as marginalized populations living outside of Cuba, and in doing so they typified race reformers during the 1940s and 1950s.

Editors of *Nuevos Rumbos* undoubtedly saw themselves as race leaders who embodied the promise of community and nation. Like other Cubans of color living in a republican society, most contributors hoped that legal reform would increase their access to education and employment. However, if these men and women represented the community of color in certain regards, they were not necessarily exemplary. Their very connection to a magazine created by club members—as suggested by the profiling of members of Afro-Cuban societies throughout *Nuevos Rumbos*' social pages—signified access to social and economic resources beyond the reach of the most Cubans of any race. While class status remained essential to agendas for reform and many activists shared the common goal of racial, gender, and class equality, political affiliation had the power to unite or divide Afro-Cubans. On one hand, attitudes about access to employment, discrimination within public places, and poor working conditions could be

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[526] See, for example, Dr. Juana Oliva Bulnes, "La Discriminacion Racial y la Educacion en America." *Nuevos Rumbos* 1946.
[527] Surama Ferrer, "Irene Diggs: Victima y Ejemplo"; Calixta Maria Hernandez, "Lo que Vi en Norteamerica." *Nuevos Rumbos*.

quite similar. On the other hand, Cubans of color might organize along racial lines, critique Afro-Cuban organizing on the basis of racial solidarity as unpatriotic, or join the struggle of "the masses" within communist-sponsored unions and organizations without supporting Afro-Cuban societies.

ANTI-RACIAL DISCRIMINATION CAMPAIGN

As PSP leaders sought to create a "Democratic National Front" in an attempt to regain their political grounding during the early 1950s, they proposed an anti-discrimination bill before Congress.[528] Members of the Communist Party and Afro-Cuban societies alike had long been critical of the government's lack of attention to issues of racial equality within employment and public establishments, including restaurants and hotels. As early as 1941, mulatto communist leader and House Representative Blas Roca introduced the "Law of Education and Sanctions against Racial Discrimination" bill that would regulate the constitutional provision that outlawed racial discrimination. Years later, in 1944, Afro-Cuban Communist Party leader Salvador García Agüero again tried to introduce the bill, this time in the senate. Yet despite numerous attempts to hold businesses responsible for not hiring Cubans of color and to create government-sponsored anti-racism campaigns, communist leaders had been unable to pass a bill. They hoped this third effort would prove more successful. In November 1951, the bill finally passed, and President Carlos Prío Socarrás (1948–1952) issued a decree that helped enforce Article 74 (equal access to work) of the Constitution.

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[528] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 221.

Black and mulatto women's employment persisted as an issue of concern for Cubans of color throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Afro-Cuban society members of Camagüey devoted a portion of their 1947 regional convention to the matter of black women's labor—the topics of the discussion were similar to Esperanza Sánchez Mastrapa's declaration that gender, socioeconomic, and racial inequalities maintained a "triple discrimination" against black women as workers. Concerned by discriminatory acts against the black woman, "and all women in general," the delegates outlined a list of grievances that highlighted the ways in which women of color were marginalized in both their "social life" and "work opportunities."[529] In particular, the convention delegates complained about Afro-Cuban women's lack of access to the trade and production industries, which forced these women to rely "solely on domestic service." While the convention attendees did outline issues pertaining to black women laborers, they neglected to focus exclusively on the economic consequences of racial discrimination. Instead, they addressed Afro-Cuban women's access to labor and professional training as a right that black women merited as citizens. Discussing labor discrimination as a violation of black women's legal rights in particular, they resolved to "fight with all our might for the approval and enactment of laws supplemented by the articles 20 and 74 of the Constitution of the Republic." They underscored that, "only with the equitable distribution of work would discrimination cease to exist."[530]

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[529] *Memoria de los trabajos realizados por la Quinta Convencion Provincial de Sociedades de Camaguey en la Sociedad* (1947).
[530] *Memoria de los trabajos*.

The attendees further outlined a series of gendered workers' rights with the goal of protecting women of color from various sectors of labor. They determined that "considering the great percentage of black women [who are] employed in domestic service—the most exploitative sector—all necessary measures should be used to ensure that this sector is included in the benefits of the legislature so that these social partners do eventually obtain maximum hours of work, rest and retribution…"[531] All women—from peasants to intellectuals—they argued, merited protection under workers' laws and were entitled to equal pay and maternity rights "to improve the conditions of her children." They further demanded increased wages for women in "female preferred sectors." Finally, Convention delegates not only underscored the fact that women of color held legal rights as citizens, but they also proposed ways to bring about reform by uplifting women who worked illegally as prostitutes. The Convention attendees of Camagüey proposed the establishment of social institutions to "save [poor black women] from vice and corruption" and to "make them useful to society."[532] Such institutions, they explained, might provide teaching sections for cutting and sewing work, which was similar to the work of organizations like the commission of Women's Affairs.

Racial Discrimination and the Law

As Afro-Cuban society members identified social programs that would help lift black women out of poverty, they emphasized that every laborer should be protected against discrimination under the 1940 Constitution. Such discussions gained greater significance

[531] *Memoria de los trabajos*.
[532] *Memoria de los trabajos*.

as the government began passing new legislation that protected the rights of working citizens. In a November 1951 article published in *La Prensa*, editors examined a degree that President Prío had recently passed to enforce the Constitution's ban on racial discrimination in the labor force. The authors began by outlining legal codes published in the *Gaceta Oficial* (*Official Gazette*), Cuba's national publication for legislative proceedings. As cited in the periodical, the 1940 Constitution declared "punishable any act of racial discrimination in the promotion of vacant positions and of the new creation in industry and commerce, following article 74 of the national constitution."[533] The new decree did not promote opportunities for blacks to be promoted or hired in particular, but instead called for color-blind hiring processes. The article noted that "Violators of this decree will be considered responsible for encouraging hatred between races and social classes, a warning that will be issued, officially, to the industry or business that breaches or circumvents the cited constitutional principal."[534] Significantly, editors of *La Prensa* reminded readers that those found guilty of racial discrimination had violated more than legal codes; they also violated the very text that served as a foundation for Cuban citizenship.

Yet despite such reforms, incidents of racial discrimination still existed, thus limiting Afro-Cuban's opportunities for employment and social mobility. One case in particular received national attention and was deemed a blatant act of racial

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[533] Esperanza Sánchez Mastrapa. "Informe ante la Comisión de los Derechos de la Mujer" in the "El II Congreso Internacional de Mujeres" (1949) AIH RB 24.9/92; de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 218.
[534] A los infractores de este decreto se les considera responsables de alentar odios entre razas y clases sociales, advirtiéndole que será intervenida, oficialmente, la industria o comercio donde se incumpla o burle el citado principio constitucional.

discrimination and a violation of the 1940 Constitution by numerous periodicals. During the winter of 1951, thirteen black and mulatto women were hired to work at El Encanto, Fin de Siglo, and La Filosofía—upscale department stores located in Havana's prominent shopping district. This marked a significant change in the stores' hiring practices—the first time that women of color had been hired to work as sales clerks. The women were fired shortly after the end of the holiday season. As explained in an article published in the national periodical *La Prensa*, "The young black women who began to work during the past month of December in the great commercial stores of the capital were thrown into the streets!"[535] Each woman hired, the author claimed, had been dismissed without reason. The author then shifted the article's focus to President Prío, imploring him to take action. From the writer's perspective, the government's response to the sudden firing of the thirteen sales clerks was an opportunity test the efficiency of Cuba's anti-discrimination policies. More specifically, Prío's treatment of the situation would demonstrate his commitment—or lack of commitment—to the cause of racial equality. Possibly wary that Prío had made bold statements without following through on his promises, the author challenged the president to "make his demagogic propaganda" useful by enforcing the anti-discrimination decree.[536]

Afro-Cuban society members also entered the discussion in support of the young women who had lost their positions. Executive board members of the Federación Nacional de Sociedades Cubanas (National Federation of Cuban Societies) deplored the

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[535] "!Ya fueron lanzadas a la calle las muchachitas negras que comenzaron a trabajar el pasado mes de diciembre en las grandes tiendas comericqles de la capital!" *Noticias de Hoy* January 1952.
[536] "Lanzadas a la calle las jovenes negras," *Noticias de Hoy* 11 January 1952.

dismissal of the sales clerks. They not only contended that the workers' civil rights had been violated, they argued that the anti-discrimination decree was "an ineffective measure that does not resolve the discrimination problem."[537] This provocative allegation implied that the government had not adequately addressed the continued practice of racial discrimination in the workplace. Above and beyond suggesting that the department stores had violated the anti-discrimination laws, the board members acknowledged the emotional impact that the firing might have had on other young women of color: "hundreds of other girls, lured by that group [of women hired and later fired], have watched the illusion of finding employment as they promised collapse."[538] Appalled, they asserted that "Everything has been a political move, demagogic. Regardless of the profound drama that this procedure involves, playing with a right as it is, the work of discriminated blacks excludes such possibilities in most workplaces of the nation." The board members thus accused the government of having little interest in protecting the rights of Cubans of color. They continued, writing:

> We have also tirelessly defended Cuba's black population, fighting discrimination in all spheres of national life. We advocate against it as a valid compliance with the Constitution and support the approval of the Education Act and Anti-Racial Discrimination bill recently passed by the House and Senate. We denounce before the people of Cuba this mockery and demand the right for these girls to work. The ranks of exclusionary unions have to be open for black men and women, as a guarantee of the fulfillment of equality in the workplace.[539]

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[537] "Lanzadas a la calle las jovenes negras."

[538] Mesa Ejecutiva de la Federacion Nacional de Sociedades Cubanas. "Declaraciones de la Federacion Nacional de Sociedades en Torno al Problema de las Muchachas Negras Desplazadas." *Orientacion Social* 11, 4 (December 1951).

[539] "Declaraciones de la Federacion Nacional de Sociedades en Torno al Problema de las Muchachas Negras Desplazadas."

Thus, the board members utilized the experiences of the young women to speak to the larger issues affecting all blacks and mulattoes: discrimination within the workplace. They noted that the struggle to protect Afro-Cuban worker's rights constituted part of an ongoing movement. Moreover, they called for more effective measures to make labor and labor unions more inclusive spaces. By demanding that the government take action on behalf of men and women of color, Afro-Cuban society members brought race to the forefront of democratic reform discourses.

Afro-Cuban society members were not satisfied with writing articles that criticized the government and the persistence of racial discrimination. Though they had achieved the implementation of anti-discrimination law—in theory if not yet in full practice—women of color continued to face challenges when attempting to secure employment in Havana's department stores. In 1954, *Orientación Social*, a monthly magazine published by Santiago de Cuba's elite society members, reported another prejudicial incident. Two "dark-skinned" young women approached the Ten Cent store in Havana in seek of employment as clerks. According to the article, they "tested very well" and demonstrated their aptitude for the position. When they were refused employment, representatives of two Havana societies approached the Labor Ministry to request assistance. The Minister promised to contact the director of the establishment, and he later reported that he had no reason to suspect that an act of discrimination had taken place. In response, *Orientación Social* editors posed the following questions: "What happened afterwards? Did they contact the young women? Has anyone been hired?" While they applauded the Minister for attempting to investigate the store's hiring

practice, they questioned his methods of inquiry. It was not enough for them to merely accept the explanation that the women had failed their "capability tests." Instead, they wanted a reformed system through which more women of color could qualify for employment. They asserted, "These ladies, like the others, have the right to work. Segregation and discrimination are incompatible with democracy. Words are not enough. We need facts."[540] Because laws were rendered meaningless if those who suffered from prejudice were unable to provide proof of discrimination, the society members' actions underscored the importance of implementing anti-discrimination laws that were actually enforced in order to maintain the integrity of Cuba's political system.

One month after the Havana society leaders approached the Labor Ministry, they reported that no progress had been made. However, they maintained hope that the government would provide an acceptable solution for addressing unfair hiring practices. "When happiness is enjoyed by some, when there is sadness we all suffer," they declared.[541] They continued, "This is not just! We want public places for all, workplaces without exclusions, and equal education for all. This is what [patriotic leaders José] Martí, [Antonio] Maceo, [Maximo] Gómez and his followers wanted, noted in Articles 20, 73 and 74 of the 1940 Constitution."[542] Interestingly, this follow-up article moved beyond addressing the Afro-Cuban women's employment through the rhetoric of citizenship and social equality, and it instead articulated the writers' concerns as a human

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[540] "Discriminacion y Segregacion." *Orientacion Social* V no 3 (September 1954).
[541] Marcel Levargie. "Discriminacion y Segregacion." *Orientacion Social* V no 4 (October 1954); "?Fueron Admitidas las Srtas. En el Ten Cent" *Orientacion Social* V no 5 (November 1954).
[542] "Declaracion Universal de los Derechos del Hombre." *Orientacion Social* (August 1951).

rights issue. Editors of *Orientación Social* referenced the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights as they invoked the nationalist narrative of equality.[543]

The writers' nuanced approach to the state and racial discrimination reflected an important trend of the early 1950s. While Cubans of color viewed access to the workplace being a legal right for all citizens, other individuals—and even some institutions—attempted to approach the matter through the global discourse of human rights as recently promoted by the United Nations. Therefore, the inability of black and mulatto women to achieve social equality took on global significance, and Cuba's political system remained in crisis.

CONCLUSION

In the decade after the Constitution of 1940, Cuban thought—in writing and in speeches—was dominated by debates about citizenship rights, and it was during these years, especially during World War II, that legal definitions of citizenship underwent profound change. The ratification of the 1940 Constitution granted full equality to all citizens, yet actually implementing these legal reforms in reality proved difficult, if not impossible. As political leaders, workers, and society members soon realized, racial and gender discrimination continued under the new democratic system.

Significantly, the 1940 Constitution provided a framework for addressing social inequalities in ways that were not available during the first thirty-eight years of the Republic. During the 1940s, Afro-Cuban women were able to participate in democratic

[543] See "Declaracion Universal de los Derechos del Hombre." *Orientacion Social* 1, 12 (August 1951); "Editorial. Los derechos humanos." *Orientacion Social* VI, no. 6 (December 1955).

reform discussions in a variety of ways. Under the presidential administration of Fulgencio Batista, Afro-Cuban women joined the Communist Party and were able to mobilize working women in support of the national government as members of the popular classes. They were able to utilize their connections to Communist Party leaders to advocate for resources and improved working conditions, demanding that the government protect the interests of working mothers and wives. Afro-Cuban women also had the opportunity to participate protest the war by highlighting the ways in which war undermined the national economy and global politics in their speeches and published articles.

By the end of World War II, Afro-Cuban women's articulation of citizenship expanded to include a consideration of gender and racial discrimination through an international perspective. They drew inspiration from the activism of women in Europe, Asia, Latin America, and the United States, and they incorporated the political strategies of these international women to inform national movements. They created a global vision of womanhood that acknowledged that discrimination in labor and education, as well as the war, presented similar obstacles to achieving full citizenship. Yet they remained cognizant of the particular dilemmas confronting Cuban women, including racial prejudice and the limitations of Cuba's legal system.

Similar to their communist counterparts, Afro-Cuban society members took an active role in reforming Cuba's political system. Women of elite societies asserted their full legal equality before Afro-Cuban audiences, and they challenged others to mobilize to defend their rights. Many society women joined communist organizations and helped

facilitate alliances between the PSP and societies that led the campaign for anti-discrimination laws during the 1940s. Society members also protested the violation of black and mulatto women's labor rights during the early 1950s. Utilizing newspapers and appealing to local government institutions, Afro-Cuban society leaders linked the experiences of women of color to the success of Cuba's political system.

Examined within the framework of citizenship, the leadership and experiences of Afro-Cuban women under the 1940 Constitutional Era highlights the ways in which gender and race informed understandings of national development. The inability of the Cuban government to enforce anti-discrimination laws exemplifies the limitations of nationalist discourses of equality, as well as the persistence of government corruptions under multiple presidential administrations. Cubans continued to wait for the realization of the goals of the 1933 Revolution. Ultimately, political instability and civil unrest led to the collapse of Cuba's political system by the revolutionaries of the 1950s.

CONCLUSION

In August 1959, eight months after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, which culminated in the overthrow of President Fulgencio Batista by Rebel Army forces, Afro-Cuban activist María Argüelles published an article entitled, "El Avance de la Revolución y la Lucha Contra la Discriminación Racial" ("The Progress of the Revolution and the Fight Against Racial Discrimination") in *Noticias de Hoy*. Writing for the newspaper's weekly women's column, Argüelles identified the stakes that blacks held in supporting the new government. Her statement likely stemmed from hearing revolutionary leader Fidel Castro deliver a speech at the Presidential Palace in Havana on March 22. Castro acknowledged that racism existed in Cuba, and he appealed to all Cubans to eliminate racism in order to build a "new *patria*."[544] Responding to this momentous occasion, Argüelles asserted that blacks had always supported Cuban independence. "From [the nineteenth-century wars] of '68 and '95, up until the glorious triumph of the Revolution on January 1, 1959, blacks have always been present as soldiers of freedom, as decent and honorable citizens," she explained.[545]

Argüelles' article more widely reveals her belief that the Revolution could potentially realize the goals of the Wars of Independence, which the republican government had failed to achieve. She determined that blacks had faith in the new government because Castro "so valiantly and publically condemned the segregation of black Cubans within the workplace." She considered the recently announced Agrarian

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[544] de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 261.

[545] Desde el 68 y el 95, hasta este Glorioso triunfo de la Revolucion del 1ro de Enero de 1959, la presencia del negro como soldado de la libertad han sido una realidad palpable, como ciudadano digno y honorable.

Reform program to be the nation's "great hope," which would alleviate the concerns of black men and women, including the "grave problem of unemployment that confronted the nation."[546] Moreover, she optimistically suggested that the Reform would help facilitate blacks' entry into industries from which they had previously been excluded, such as government agencies. These new opportunities would allow Cubans of color "more opportunities to sustain themselves honorably."[547] Writing on behalf of the community of color, she concluded: "We hope that the Revolution will resolve the issue of racial discrimination. In the meantime, we fight so that soon, very soon, racism will exist as nothing more than a bad memory for the great Cuban family."[548]

Argüelles' article serves not only as an example of one Afro-Cuban woman's expectations of the 1959 Revolution, but as evidence of the ways in which Afro-Cuban women actively theorized nation formation in Cuba during the twentieth century. The legacy of their theorization, marked by concerns such as employment, political representation, and social mobility, more broadly illustrates their conviction that the patriarchal nationalist rhetoric of racial equality afforded rights to every Cuban. In addition, the history of Afro-Cuban women's social thought elucidates a range of social perspectives defined, in part, by ones race, gender, and class, among other identity markers. Thus, an analysis of Afro-Cuban women's contributions to Cuba's political, cultural, and social history underscores larger ideas of citizenship and national identity, ideas that were constantly in flux and subject to negotiation.

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[546] Ibid.
[547] Ibid.
[548] Esperamos que la Revolucion resolvera el problema de la discriminacion en Cuba, y mientras, luchemos por que pronto, muy pronto, no sea mas, que un mal recuerdo en la gran familia cubana.

In examining Cuban nation formation through an intersectional analysis, I examined three periods that that exemplified how racialized and gendered discourses of citizenship evolved throughout the Republican era; the first several chapters focused upon elite and aspiring-class Afro-Cubans' claims for citizenship during the early years of the republic. Following the establishment of the republic, Afro-Cubans found themselves in a precarious position. While the nationalist rhetoric of racial egalitarianism asserted an all-inclusive, patriarchal understanding of political rights, the press and burgeoning field of social science undermined Afro-Cuban social equality by suggesting that they were intellectually and culturally inferior. This rationale supported racist practices through which whites often excluded Cubans of color from employment opportunities, as well as social settings that included elite clubs, parks, hotels, and restaurants. Yet, as historians have shown, the ideology of racial egalitarianism provided Cubans of color with leverage for attaining political representation and, in some cases, social mobility.

Afro-Cubans developed a range of strategies for utilizing nationalist ideologies to attain citizenship rights and social equality. For one, they responded to anti-black racism by protesting incidents of discrimination. They also articulated patriarchal discourses of racial progress through which they hoped to demonstrate their merit for social equality among a select group of elite and aspiring-class individuals. Racial progress discussions entailed promoting intellectual and moral refinement, as well as education, as a path towards social mobility. Blacks and mulattos who participated in these dialogues critiqued the assumed immorality of poor Cubans of color and required that women fulfill

their commitment to racial improvement as mothers and caretakers. In addition, patriarchal understandings of racial progress helped establish boundaries of exclusion that manifest in practice; male Afro-Cuban leaders utilized their clubs and social events—including weddings and annual parties—to limit women's participation in their organizations to auxiliary branches and excluded the participation of the laboring poor altogether. Therefore, the notion of respectability that elite and aspiring-class male leaders articulated to attain recognition of their rights directly benefitted a select few.

Elite and aspiring-class Afro-Cuban women utilized literary venues to pursue both individual and collective advancement, even while articulating patriarchal discourses of racial progress. These women worked within the exclusionary boundaries created by racial progress discourses to articulate their vision of modern womanhood in relation to evolving gender norms. For example, women of the Afro-Cuban political group the Partido Indpendiente de Color (Independent Colored Party) focused on uplifting racial manhood as their male leaders faced accusations of promoting racism and were imprisoned and harassed by the government. Afro-Cuban feminists merged racial progress discourses with evolving gender norms to assert their right to receive an education for their individual development as well as collective improvement. Both elite and aspiring-class women wrote letters to appeal to the elite Afro-Cuban political leader Juan Gualberto Gómez in order to claim access to education, job opportunities, and pensions; they emphasized their familial ties to fathers and brothers, as well as their need to take care of children and elderly parents, in order to align themselves with patriarchal gender norms. Afro-Cuban women's articles and letters exemplify that their early social

thought entailed reconciling the male leadership and political rights with women's roles as community builders, in addition to addressing their everyday concerns within this framework.

Many Cubans of color employed photography as an additional strategy for pursuing individual and collective advancement. As Chapter 3 demonstrated, Afro-Cubans used photographic portraits to create alternative representations of Afro-Cuban womanhood and the nuclear family. These photographs included props—such as clothing, household furniture, and books or musical instruments—that helped illustrate the sitter's morality and intellectual attainments. Portraits of a female sitter emphasized her femininity and cultural refinement. Family pictures revealed the existence of patriarchal households in which the father served as the leader and protector of his wife and children. Whether an illustration of the subject's actual achievements or a display of the her/his aspirations, Afro-Cuban photographic portraits challenged stereotypical representations of black and mulatto hypersexuality and degeneration found within dominant popular culture. As such, they buttressed patriarchal agendas for racial progress articulated by elite and aspiring-class Cubans of color.

In Chapter 4, a sustained consideration of how Cubans discussed the experiences of the black woman underscores how attempts to initiate legal reforms addressed forms of racial, gender, and class oppression during the 1930s. During the period, the rise of popular movements in protest of falling wages and rising unemployment, government corruption, and calls for a more inclusive vision of the nation paralleled the emergence of discussions of a black female experience. Communist, labor union, and feminist leaders

began to acknowledge that black women faced a "triple discrimination" due to race, gender, and class oppression. Afro-Cuban women participated in these debates by underscoring the interests of black women and their families. They articulated a new, politicized image of black motherhood in which they shifted from discussions of respectability politics to a broader understanding of Afro-Cuban womanhood. This insight allowed them to call attention not only to issues of economic discrimination as workers, but the privileges that elite Afro-Cuban men and white women held and that allowed black men and white women to participate in the marginalization of black women. In many regards, this example elucidates the central argument of this work—that Cuban nation formation must be examined through an intersectional analysis of racial and gender ideologies in order to fully consider the range of social experiences produced during the republican period. The various relationships that existed among whites, Afro-Cubans, men, and women make evident how social power operated outside of state institutions.

Afro-Cuban women's political agency entailed navigating multiple social movements in order to demand legal reform on behalf of women, Afro-Cubans, and workers. The 1930s also witnessed the transformation of the feminist movement during which women of color joined women's organizations in order to demand suffrage rights and labor reforms. By joining the ranks of the women's movement, black and mulatto women called attention to the issues that laboring women and black women faced in particular and helped place these issues on the agenda of the mainstream feminist movement. Within feminist organizations, they questioned the privileges of white women

and implored white women to affirm their commitment to ending women's oppression by actively challenging racial discrimination and their own privileges. They also recruited other women of color into the movement by suggesting that Cuban women's unity in political struggle was necessary movement for achieving their particular struggles as black women. Moreover, they presented feminist perspectives to the Afro-Cuban community by discussing women's suffrage, venerating motherhood as a political matter, and defending poor black women. Their affiliation with a range of political and social organizations shows that Afro-Cuban women's political influence lay in their ability to move across social movements, during which they helped define the objectives of each.

By the 1940s, Afro-Cuban women's vision of the nation incorporated a new understanding of the relationship between the government and its citizens; women of color from a range of political and socioeconomic standpoints demanded political representation and reform on their behalf. The ratification of the 1940 Constitution initiated critical shifts in Cuban politics that made the social welfare of each citizen the government's responsibility. Every Cuban became equal before the law, with discrimination of any kind ruled illegal. Women received suffrage rights and political representation for the first time. Women of color, along with other Cuban activists, used this groundbreaking legislation to demand that the government defend the rights of its citizens by establishing and enforcing anti-discrimination measures. They protested unfair wages and prejudice in employment, as well as international issues such as fascism, political stability, and women's rights in other nations. As affiliates of the communist movement, many working class Afro-Cuban women connected their concerns

to a broader political movement for reform. In many cases, they succeeded in achieving higher wages and more favorable working conditions. Indeed, Cuban women of color now had a legal framework in which to articulate their claims, contributing to a protest tradition that underscored the connection of social movements for gender, racial, and labor reform within the context of new legal rights. However, that the new Constitutional era failed to bring about full social equality reveals the extent to which the government failed to follow through on its promise to end corruption and discrimination.

The study of Cuban nation formation from the perspectives of Afro-Cuban women raises several additional themes, which, though not examined explicitly, emerged in each chapter. First, Cuban women of color frequently incorporated patriotism into their understandings of citizenship throughout the Republican era. They invoked the War of Independence, referencing the legacy of heroes José Martí and Antonio Maceo, including how these figures imagined social unity, as well as the rights afforded to women and Afro-Cubans by this rhetoric. Afro-Cubans invoked patriotic discourses not only in proclaiming racial fraternity, but also in support of race-based political mobilization as affiliates of the PIC. Their notions of racial progress included the improvement of the community of color *and* nation; they sought to improve themselves both to demonstrate their merit for citizenship and to contribute to the nation's overall progress. Afro-Cuban women underscored that their male PIC leaders established the organization to achieve their right as citizens to have an education, access to fair employment and working conditions. They also understood women's role a patriots to take care of their families as extensions of the nation. Moreover, Afro-Cuban women articulated the feminist

perspective that the nation needed to modernize to incorporate women's legal rights through family reform laws and, eventually, suffrage rights. During the 1939 National Women's Congress they advocated for unity among women of all social groups—across racial, professional, religious, political, and geographical identifications. In doing so, they replicated the nineteenth century vision of the nation, incorporating gender dimensions that emphasized women's unity on behalf of national improvement.

The second theme that emerged while examining Afro-Cuban women's theorizing of the nation included evolving perspectives on the relationship between the state and its citizens. Such perspectives reflected not only ideological debates related to the assumed moral and intellectual capabilities of Afro-Cubans and women, but material concerns as well. From the inception of the republic, the nationalist rhetoric afforded suffrage and political representation to all men regardless of race. Therefore, Afro-Cuban women emphasized their roles within the community of color instead, and they appealed to individual leaders and employers to address their educational and labor goals. Though women demanded political representation throughout the early decades of the twentieth century, only in 1940 would women finally gain suffrage rights. Yet, even then, colonial legal codes that outlined women's subordinate status would continue to affect their rights to full citizenship. An examination of Afro-Cuban women's activist and intellectual activities that addressed the need for legal rights and resources reveals how Cubans' understandings of citizenship evolved throughout the Republican era.

Finally, class dynamics and economic oppression figured prominently into how Afro-Cuban women understood the nation and their role in its formation throughout the

Republican era. A consideration of class illuminates the particular concerns among women who sought financial stability, and it provides insight into the ways in which class status affected how Afro-Cuban women saw and sought to define themselves, as well as the ways in which they helped create boundaries of exclusion within the community of color. Yet an analysis of class also points to the archive: who appeared in the documents, during which particular moments, and why. The primary documents that I encountered from the early years of the republic consisted primarily of elite and aspiring-class Afro-Cuban organizational records, newspapers and magazines, and letters sent to Gómez. For the most part, only elite women who formed part of a community of literate Cubans of color who published had the opportunity to write magazines and articles for dissemination. These women also had the time to engage in intellectual discourse, as many worked as professionals or received financial support from their fathers and husbands. The letters that I examined help to complicate these elite perspectives by incorporating the concerns of semi-literate women who also aspired to social mobility. Only during the 1930s did I find the appearance of aspiring-class and poor Afro-Cuban women in periodicals and organizational records as members of feminist organizations and labor unions. During the 1940s and early 1950s, Afro-Cuban women activists from a variety of class backgrounds appeared in the newspapers in protest of unfair working conditions, to demand labor rights, and in support of broader issues such as political stability in Cuba and abroad. This is not to say that poor Afro-Cuban women did not protest their working conditions and demand citizenship rights, rather my analysis focuses on the perspectives of a particular group of women who were elite and aspiring-

class. I hope that future works will explore these perspectives further. Such analyses will complicate the study of Afro-Cuban womanhood by revealing perspectives informed not only by race, gender, and class, but also political views, religion, and geographical location.

In my research, I have found that fundamentally what was at stake in Afro-Cuban women's theorization of the nation was the recognition of the full humanity of every individual, regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic status. Mariana Argüelles echoed this sentiment in her 1959 article for the readers of *Noticias de Hoy*. She desired that the revolutionary government would finally realize the goals of the nineteenth century in order to create a racially egalitarian society. Yet her vision of a new nation entailed the defense of women and workers, a vision of the nation that had evolved since the dawn of the twentieth century. Indeed, Afro-Cuban women held a very different social and political position in 1959 than that which they had in at the inception of the republic in 1902.

Given the overall and particular focus of my argument, I hope this study will speak to a broad audience interested in the intersection of race, gender, community formation, and nation building. Even further, discourses about citizenship during the republican era—from women's political representation to racial discrimination, from labor rights to state power—have remained incredibly relevant. Race and gender were as important in early-twentieth-century Cubans' lives as they are in contemporary Cuba and in other nations. Understanding how race and gender operated sheds light not only on ideologies themselves, but also on the worlds in which such ideologies operated.

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